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Mirrors of the holy

MIRRORS OF THE HOLY

teresa de jesus

S. TERESA.
From the Portrait by Fray Juan de la Miseria, Valladolid

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THEOLOGICAL

MIRRORS OF THE HOLY

Ten Studies in Sanctity
by Lucy Menzies
Author of 'S. Columba of Iona,' 'Saints in Italy,' etc.

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To
Evelyn Underhill

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THE Light of Faith is as a mirror, as Thou, Eternal Trinity, dost make me know; for, gazing into this mirror, holding it with the hand of love, it shows me myself in Thee who am Thy creature and Thee in me by the union which Thou didst make of Thy Godhead with our humanity.

S. CATHARINE OF SIENA.

WETE thou well that he that desireth for to see his God him behoveth for to cleanse his soul, the which is as a mirror in the which all things are clearly seen when it is clean.

RICHARD OF ST. VICTOR.

THE Soul is primarily a Force and an Energy, and Holiness is a growth of that Energy in Love, in Full Being and in Creative Spiritual Personality.

FRIEDRICH VON HÜGEL.

INTRODUCTION

THIS book aims at showing in a simple way what sanctity really is. There seem to be many erroneous ideas about it. Those who regard the saints as idle contemplatives are just as mistaken as those who think them efficient philanthropists—and nothing more. The initial mistake lies, of course, in regarding them as a race apart, since their great attraction and delight is that they were just ordinary human beings like ourselves. Yet think what they made of life! That they received more than we do, was in part at least because they trained themselves to be able to receive more, and because they gave themselves utterly, keeping nothing back. Christianity was for them indeed a heroism. Religion was no narrow ritual, no cramping observance. It was their whole life, and that in a rich, genial, and often extremely unconventional way. They did not try to escape from the world; they tried rather to transform it. They achieved a certain temper in which they insisted on seeing the best side of things, yet this general tendency towards a willed and bracing optimism was achieved, not by shutting their eyes to the dark, but by pushing through it in the certain faith that light would be found at the other side. This temper of the saints had also a little sparkle in it; 'a delicate humour,' it has been said, 'was their crowning glory.'

We must not, then, think of them as a race apart. Their sanctity was produced from the common

stuff of human life. They were not less but more human than their fellows. They were all journeying towards the same goal, but they did not all travel by the same road. Moreover, they set out from very different starting-points. Thus, of the ten examples in this book, some started from the world, some from the cloister. One was an abbess; one was a clerk in a livery stable. One belonged to the old nobility; another was a dyer's daughter. And so on. Environment may be important, but it does not make the saint. Two things are said to be necessary for that—absolute confidence in God, and absolute distrust of self. Not moral perfection, but knowledge of God and knowledge of self. In other words, love and trust on one side, humility and selflessness on the other.

Now, seeing that training is as necessary for the development of sanctity as for that of any other kind of genius, how did the saints set about it? In the first place they became aware, either gradually or suddenly, of something other than themselves. The intensity of their perception varied 'from a faint sense of wonder to an absolute conviction that for a timeless moment they had been caught up into union with the Eternal.' They were aware in this experience of something which transcended their imagination; which surrounded them, yet dwelt within them; which filled their hearts with awe and delight, and which compelled their absolute allegiance.

That was the starting-point; the development of sanctity depended on the use that was made of it. Those who took it seriously found a bracing severity and completeness in the demands which this experience of the supernatural made on them. It was not so much a question of detachment from things as of detachment from self. All their

primitive instincts had to be disciplined and redirected towards other-worldly aims. The saints thought much about the training of the will; and though modern psychologists use longer words, these often merely restate the conclusions which the saints reached long ago.

Thus S. François de Sales probably expressed the conviction of all who have seriously cultivated the spiritual life, when he declared that character alone could make a life fruitful; that perfection depended on self, not on circumstance, on a vigorous and disciplined will. He thought no one could be a good Christian who was not laborious in the duties of his calling. Every one must develop his own personality. 'Be yourself!' he would exclaim, 'but your *best* self!' The energy of the whole being had thus to be trained and developed for the service of God; and this not only for narrowly religious ends. 'The soul is a force and an energy, and holiness is a growth of that energy in full being'—not only in the religious element.

As this book only aims at giving a simple account of the sanctified life, no technical description of the mystical degrees of prayer will be attempted; though the three stages of the mystic way—purgation, illumination, and union—are all more or less clearly visible in the studies which follow. Yet, though we leave technical considerations alone, we must never forget that even the greatest saints—they indeed most of all—gave themselves to arduous training in the life of prayer. Though they began with an experience of reality common in some degree to many of us, they trained themselves by serious and costly effort to be able to apprehend what the Divine Voice was saying to them.

Beginning with vocal prayer, they built up a habit of trained and connected devotion, a habit

of fixing their minds on things beyond and above themselves and the tiny planet on which they lived. They looked towards that mysterious and infinite Perfection in which, with amazement but with conviction, they realized their true home to be. Their attitude was that of children to a Father who liked to hear even about their small affairs. They devoted a good deal of time at first to exclusive intercourse with this supernatural Power for whom they longed, and of whose love for them they were so vividly aware. By 'prayer' they meant this intercourse of their little human spirits with the Eternal God who was yet their Father; a humble, willed attention in which they offered themselves to Him, often in silence, and quietly awaited His commands. It took many of them a long time to be able to hear His voice and know what was being asked of them. Their own clamorous individuality had to be silenced first. 'It is very rare,' as Fénelon said, 'to find a soul quiet enough to hear God speak.'

Their prayer was thus rather an attitude of mind than an asking for things, though in special cases they did that too. The point I wish to make is that their intercourse with God was not with a dread, tremendous Power of whom they were afraid, but with a Father whom they regarded as Infinite Love. From such intercourse they returned eager to do His work. So that their prayer was creative rather than self-seeking; it was not an accompaniment to their lives, it was their whole life. Through it they became the instruments of God, able to work His will on the world.

Another point about prayer as conceived by the saints is the intensity with which they believed in it. Not only in its purifications and joys for the praying soul, but in its power. Thus S. Bernard,

preaching a crusade on the Rhine, writes to S. Hildegard, 'I trust that when you are united to God in spirit you will be able to profit us much.' S. Hildegard herself answered no questions, till she had obtained interior light on them in prayer. Madame Acarie never willingly applied herself to any question without having first felt some interior leading about it. And S. Teresa, oppressed by the sin and heresy of the world, began the reform of the Carmelite Order that she might fight these things by lives devoted to prayer. Such lives, set apart in a quiet place, were protected from the distractions of the world; yet they performed a real function in it. As Augustine Baker said, 'The well-being of both nation and Church depends more than we imagine on hidden lives of prayer.'

Once real detachment was achieved, distracting worry was replaced by energetic peace. Those who had given themselves utterly, who had done all they could, were content to leave the responsibility elsewhere. 'O Lord!' S. Teresa exclaimed, amid the crushing difficulties of her first foundation, 'this house was founded for Thee! It is not mine! I have done all I can for it! Do Thou see to it!' Thus delivered from any sense of its own importance, the sanctified life becomes free and supple; its own thoughts and feelings do not matter. After the first fine fervours the saints had little of that soft emotional delight in prayer which is so often thought to be the attraction of the spiritual life. Such joys are gifts, most often sent to encourage the beginner. The saints thought more of the Giver than of the gift; their prayer was an act of willed self-giving, a consecration of their whole being to God. Such was their heaven, 'a temper rather than a place.'

We all long for peace. The saints achieved it by

bringing 'all the hundred voices of desire into unison.' They did not narrow down their being by intensive self-culture. Setting all their desire on God, making Him the centre of their longing, they opened their hearts wide and generously to receive His messages. Such messages came to them through nature as well as through grace. They saw Him in all lovely natural things. As the Divine Voice said to Mechthild, 'Whosoever knows and loves the nobleness of My freedom, cannot bear to love Me alone in Myself; he must love Me in the creatures, though I remain ever nearest his soul.' S. Joseph of Cupertino provides us with a beautiful instance of this. Picking a daisy he would hold it up and exclaim, 'O God! so visible and so forgotten!'

Thus the religion of the saints, far from being confined to merely devotional acts, was really the sanctification of their whole lives. They were lives of hardness, for the astringent quality is a necessary ingredient of sanctity. A certain asceticism is always found in the life of prayer; it is in its right place and proportion, 'an absolutely essential constituent of the Christian outlook.'[1] The saints did not belong to what has been called the 'sunshiney school'; they did not shut their eyes to sin and suffering. But they contrived to make their sins, as Julian of Norwich put it, 'not wounds but worships'; if they could be utilized, made to benefit the unfortunate who had committed them, then they became 'honourable and salutary,' a sort of medicine to prevent him from becoming self-satisfied, to humble him and make him ready for heaven.

Yet there is a refreshing absence in the saints of anything approaching self-righteousness. They

[1] Von Hügel, *Selected Letters*, p. 275.

are very humble, because they know they can do nothing of themselves. 'Well do I see how little I can do!' exclaimed Teresa. 'But close to Thee, aloft in this watch-tower where truth is seen, if Thou dost not leave me, I can do all things!' Neither has their sanctity anything smug or invertebrate about it. It is rather a strong, disciplined, selfless, 'widespreading love to all in common.' Those who achieve it, says the *Theologia Germanica*, 'are to the Eternal Goodness, what his right hand is to a man'; in other words, the instruments of God.

'The saint has no fads,' according to Coventry Patmore; 'you may live in the same house with him and never find out that he is not a sinner like yourself.' What is true of modern saints, is true also of their forebears. They disliked being singular. Sanctity does not necessarily or frequently lie in the unusual. 'Singularity is a vice Thou extremely hatest,' as Dame Gertrude More remarked. Too much has been made of the ecstasies and abnormal experiences of the saints. They were the outward signs of an intense realization of the divine, signs to which the saints themselves attached no undue importance, concealing them if they could. S. Teresa, for instance, is nearly always presented to us as what we might call a confirmed ecstatic. Yet when we study her for ourselves we find her a virile and heroic woman with wide vision and happy wit, who was consciously guided and supported by God. Visions and ecstasies she undoubtedly did have, but she knew, as her friend S. John of the Cross said, that 'one good work or act of the will wrought in charity, was more precious in the sight of God than that which all the visions and revelations of heaven might effect.'

It was said of Brother Giles that all the inconvenient moments had been left out of his day ; and this is a family characteristic of the saints. They were never hurried, never too busy to be of use to other people. They cared little, too, what other people thought of them, whether their work was ever heard of or not. Yet everything that they did was effective ; there was a wholeness and beauty about it because it was done by those who, like Enoch, 'walked with God, and heard the Voice continually and gave up their own will to do the will of the Voice.' Their religion was a rich and splendid thing in which their whole being was involved. Its result was a balanced and disciplined mind ; a wide, sane, all-embracing spirituality.

But the achievement of the absolute selflessness essential to this truly supernatural life, was not easy. We know, even in the little things of life, how difficult it is to put aside our self-centred point of view, our individual desires ; to bow absolutely to the will of another. It can only be done through love. Mothers achieve it, forgetting themselves for their children. Theirs is a selfless devotion, not unlike the love which inspires the saints. Yet it is different in origin : for God Himself implants in the soul the love with which it loves Him, and such love is, they tell us, nothing less than God Himself.

Plato first formulated this doctrine, which filtered into Christianity through S. Augustine—'*Thou* art the love wherewith the heart loves Thee!' That conviction strengthened and inspired the saints. Some of them may have learnt it from the philosophers. Many knew it by instinct. All learnt it ultimately from experience.

God was their inspiration as well as their fulfilment ; their origin as well as their goal. They

sought Him because they had already found Him, and wished to find Him more completely. Nothing they could do could be worthy of His acceptance unless He made it so. They gave Him what was already His. They went for strength and guidance to Him who dwelt within them, yet enfolded them. And from such encounters they came forth not only 'joyous and rosy faced' but eager to be about their Father's business. Ruysbroeck describes the man who is sent down from such heights as a 'living and willing instrument of God, with which God works whatsoever He wills and howsoever He wills. . . . And by this he possesses a universal life, for he is ready alike for contemplation and for action, and is perfectly in both of them at once.'[1]

The point is that the outward works of sanctity could not be so radiantly performed, did not a long interior preparation go before; were the background of contemplation not there to inspire and shine through action. Thus Catharine of Genoa, after long training in prayer, found her opportunity for action in the hospital and slum. Teresa, leaving her contemplation to perform the menial duties of the kitchen-maid, found her Lord among the pots and pans. Marie de l'Incarnation, working outwardly in a stable, was inwardly 'in continual tendency to God.' And Elisabeth Leseur, an invalid in almost constant pain, unable to do any outward work, found that not only prayer but suffering could become creative.

It is not strange that spirits nourished on the story of the Passion should quickly have understood the redemptive power of suffering. Mechthild was convinced that the only weapons by which she could win her way to God were the sufferings and death of Christ; *that* redemptive sacrifice was

[1] Ruysbroeck, *The Sparkling Stone*, cap. xiv.

the only key which could unlock the gates of heaven. The saints all exulted in this truth. But they did not stop there. They wished to share in that sublime sacrifice. They felt that if they were really to grow up into the full stature of Christ, they must grow up into suffering too. Thus Angela of Foligno reflected that the companions God gave His Son during the whole of His life on earth were 'continual poverty, continual contempt, and the utmost suffering.' 'Yet do we,' she exclaims in horror, 'ever seek to be exalted and preferred and live in liberty!'

And like Angela, many of the saints came gradually to realize that their sins and imperfections did not only affect themselves but sullied the purity of the whole community to which they belonged, just as the smallest ink stain sullies the purity of the whole cloth. We see here the emergence of a doctrine restated in our own time in a positive way. The efforts and aspirations of even the humblest soul are held to affect the standard of the whole community and thus ultimately of the race.[1] Baron von Hügel's belief that 'one soul can not only pray, but suffer for another' lifts us into an even more rarified atmosphere. Yet here, too, we find the saints.

Suffering was for S. Catharine of Siena a creative, even a utilitarian thing; not an evil but a means to good, what Mechthild called the 'grave but kindly teacher of immortal secrets.' Catharine welcomed suffering, both because it was sent by God and because it was a purifying pain. She was thus able to use all suffering. But she went beyond this. She not only bore it; she embraced it and sought it out, that by her suffering she might expiate the sins of others. She comforted the

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Man and the Supernatural*, p. 258.

condemned and the dying in the prisons and hospitals of Rome and Siena by telling them she had taken their sins upon herself and would do penance for them. There was for her a double joy in so doing; she was serving her neighbour and she was sharing in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ. Her namesake of Genoa thought that nothing but the purifying discipline of this world could fit her for the longed-for union with her Source. And so she accepted it joyfully.

This is to be understood not only in regard to physical pain, for it is not to be compared with the spiritual sufferings of desolation, loneliness, and utter despair. These, too, the saints trained themselves to accept, not only with gratitude but with joy; like the Jesuit novice who told Baron von Hügel how grand he had found the practice of at once meeting suffering with joy—'God alone can help us to succeed in this,' the Baron adds, 'but what is Christianity if it is not something like that?'[1]

One of the chief uses of suffering in the eyes of the saints, was that of throwing them more completely on the mercy of God, showing them their utter dependence on Him. But they welcomed it also because they could offer it for others. 'Man gets in giving. Love enriches the lover. He gains his soul who pours it forth.' Temptation, anxiety, loneliness, pain, darkness of soul—all these could be offered to God to be merged in the atoning sacrifice of Christ. Thus human and divine love and suffering became one; human suffering, in itself so small and unworthy a thing to offer Christ, was transmuted by His love, and the saint co-operated in the atoning sacrifice of his divine Master.

[1] Von Hügel, *Selected Letters*, p. 299.

We need not multiply instances of the conviction of the saints that suffering was not only necessary for the formation of their own character and personality, but could be used for the good of others. 'Sanctity and suffering are the same thing,' said the Abbé Huvelin. 'You will never do anything for others save through suffering. By suffering Christ saved the world—not by His great words, not by the Sermon on the Mount, but by His blood, by His pain on the Cross.' In Elisabeth Leseur we find the doctrine of suffering carried further than it had gone before her. Suffering was for her the only infallible form of action, the perfect form of prayer. She thought that in our sufferings we could reach out to other souls 'both dear and distant, and bring them light and peace and holiness.' That all takes place of course within the atmosphere of prayer, but as we must consider her interpretation of it in her own life, we need not go into it here.

While we have dwelt on the efforts and sufferings of the saints themselves, it must not be forgotten that though they knew these efforts must be fully made, they were yet deeply conscious of the givenness of grace. They were well aware when they conquered a temptation or renewed hope in some despairing soul, that it was not their own virtue that gave them the victory. S. Catharine of Siena, after a grim struggle with temptation, reproached her Lord that He had left her to struggle alone. 'My daughter,' He answered, '*I* was in thy heart! It was with My virtue and not with thine own that thou so faithfully battled!' They knew they could give God nothing till they had first received it from Him: the outward-flowing tide of love for man was perpetually renewed by the inward flowing love of God. They were the children of a Father

who took pleasure in the little human creatures He had made for Himself. Not only did the soul need and long for God but, as Mechthild insisted, God needed and longed for the soul, though in a very different degree. Marie de l'Incarnation writes, 'though my soul knew itself base and vile under so divine a Majesty, its inward inclination was nevertheless to *possess* that Majesty by a right as yet unknown to it but of which it had presentiments.' And in S. Catharine of Genoa we seem to recognize a conviction that God respects the soul of man.

Thus in spite of, probably because of, the astringency, the asceticism, the necessity of suffering, the religion of the saints is full of deep, tranquil joy. 'That which costs nothing,' said Luis de Leon, 'is worth nothing.' The saints did not count the cost. Like Teresa they wished to make some payment in return. Thus Marie de l'Incarnation said of a time of spiritual stress, 'It might well be called a martyrdom, but one most sweet.' The knowledge that all suffering was endured for love made for that spirit of freedom and freshness which is so characteristic of sanctity, and which remains so contagious even after centuries.

This doctrine of the joyful acceptance of suffering is found in Christianity alone, but it is an essential part of Christianity:

> For a Person came and lived and loved and did and taught and died and rose again and lives on by His power and His spirit for ever within us and amongst us, so unspeakably rich yet so simple, so sublime and yet so homely, so divinely above us, precisely in being so divinely near . . . with Him and alone with Him and those who still learn and live from and by Him, there is the union of the clearest, keenest sense of all the mysterious depth and breadth and length and height of human sadness, suffering, and sin, *and*, in spite of this and through this . . . a note of conquest and of triumphant joy.

. . . The pain gets fully faced and willed . . . suffering thus becomes the highest form of action, a divinely potent means of . . . enlargement for the soul . . . with its immense capacity for joy in self-donation.[1]

It is precisely this joy in self-donation, combined with deep hunger and affinity for God, which gives the saints their positive quality. They are full of zest and joy. There is nothing rigid or slavish about them, no formality, no heaviness. It is their frank simplicity and humility which make them so winning and persuasive. They disliked intensely any parade of their religion. Many of them preferred to be thought foolish. The little human stories about them endear them to us; their childlike delight in little things, their simple yet lofty standards. They had their full share of the troubles which inevitably beset mankind. Yet the deep well of peace within them seemed at times to bubble up and overflow in gaiety.

Think of S. Teresa, she who thought a melancholy nun 'worse than a legion of devils'—how she used to write gay little songs to celebrate some special occasion and sing them with her nuns to the accompaniment of pipe and drum. Correct people were apt to be shocked at her, so were some of her own flock; but Teresa robustly assured them that in order to endure life, everything was necessary. If it is to be full and complete nothing must be left out, certainly not the leaven of gaiety.

Even S. Catharine of Genoa, that most abstract and philosophic of mystics, allowed the joy of her heart to burst forth in childlike rhymes which she 'sang to herself for joy.' The same sort of detachment from things, sitting loose to the world and rising above circumstances, is seen in Marie de l'Incarnation, the Teresa of the New World. She

[1] Von Hügel, *Mystical Element*, i. 27.

had the instinctive, almost fastidious, love of her countrywomen for dainty ways, and yet when training her little Indian savages to be cleanly and civilized, she had to conquer that fastidiousness. 'We often find an old shoe in the soup pot,' she wrote from Quebec, '*but we do not make too much of that!*' Yet such little rubs are infinitely more trying than the big bruises.

The saints accepted them unruffled. They really achieved detachment. Self had long been driven out from the centre of their being and the void it left filled with love of God and neighbour, 'for both are one love.' They really believed and acted on the doctrine of S. Ignatius that 'just so much does a soul advance in spiritual things as it goes out from self-love, self-will, and self-interest.'

Their spiritual attitude was one of adoration. That is their great secret. They thought of God, not of themselves. Their prayer was centred not in introspective sorrow for sin, not in anxious requests, not even in thanksgiving; but in adoration. And because their whole energies were absorbed in this they forgot themselves and everything fell into its true perspective. All that they did—even the smallest thing—was consciously done for supernatural ends, and the radiance of their joy shone through it all. They lived in the atmosphere of eternity. Yet their constant awareness of it led, not to narrowness or intensity, but to hard and unremitting toil for others. For them, as for S. Teresa, the object of the spiritual marriage was work; Martha and Mary must work together if God was to be perfectly served. Creative in their prayer, they were creative also in this that they gathered spiritual families around them; through them and their descendants, as well as

through their own writings, their influence radiates out in ever widening circles to infinity.

It may be objected that I have only dealt with one aspect of the saintly type ; that I have ignored the extremists and the self-tormentors. My answer is that the kind of life which I have tried, however imperfectly, to describe is the kind of life in which I believe true sanctity to consist. I have purposely refrained from using the word mystic ; yet the studies in this book are all of saints who may truly be called mystics, for their lives aimed at union with God. Their wills were united to His will in all things.

The saints are the leaven of the world. Putting the question on its lowest level, it has been said that economically the saintly group of qualities is indispensable to the world's welfare. I think we may safely put it higher than that. For the saint is the link between this transitory life and the eternal ; ' he only has meaning,' says Miss Evelyn Underhill, ' so far as he is in some way creative ; and thus becomes a channel through which God, the Abiding Perfect, acts within the successive world.' [1]

S. Teresa tells us that ' it is a good way of enjoying God to have converse with His friends.' The ten we have chosen to converse with here are drawn from a period extending over the last nine centuries. S. Hildegard, who lived in the eleventh century, is the first important woman saint about whom we have much authentic information and who left behind her a large quantity of her own writings. After her our examples are taken at fairly regular intervals down the centuries to Elisabeth Leseur, who translates the spiritual life into terms of our own day. Geographically our examples are

[1] *Man and the Supernatural*, p. 255.

drawn from various European countries; we might almost include Canada seeing that Marie de l'Incarnation did her chief work there. My idea has been to show that this particular kind of life is not confined to any age or land but may be found in every country and in all ages. There is no special significance in the fact that all the studies are of women saints: such was the book I was asked to write.

Accounts of such lives should of course be written from within outwards, seeing that the outward is in every case an expression of the inward. But the outward being the visible, obtrudes itself, and after all only through it can we guess at the inward. It was suggested to me that I should deal in these studies both with contemplative and active saints. But the saints are saints because of their relationship to God, a relationship which can only be nourished by prayer. No so-called active saint but has her background of contemplation; no contemplative but uses the grace which flows through her in active work, though this work may be the hidden work of prayer. For, as so many of them have said to us, *Love cannot be idle.*

As no reading or writing about the saints or mystics can take the place of first-hand study of their own works, and as many of their experiences could only be described by the saint who experienced them, I have quoted largely from their writings and have made them as far as possible tell their own story.

It remains to express my indebtedness. My book could never have been written but for the help of other books. Some of the studies in it are of women who are well known and for the study of whose lives there is a plenty of authentic material. Of others, hardly known in this country, little has

been written in any language. Yet wherever I have gone, whether to the eleventh century or to the twentieth, whether to Europe or to the New World, I have found Miss Evelyn Underhill before me. Like every student of this subject, I am under the deepest obligation to her and to her books. She has interpreted the saints to us with genius, and has given us opportunity to understand their lives, as well as incentive to know them and make them our friends.

For myself, these studies would never have been written but for her help and encouragement, and I venture to offer them to her in gratitude.

L. M.

Feast of S. Catharine of Genoa, 1928.

Mirrors of the Holy

S. HILDEGARD OF BINGEN
1098–1180

TRAVELLING down the valley of the Nahe, we come, about thirty miles south of Bingen, near the village of Böckelheim, to a rocky little hill crowned by the ruins of a castle overgrown with wild roses, pinks, and brambles. It was probably here that Hildegard, the first of the great German mystics, was born.

Germany was then in a state of turmoil. Hildegard would remember Henry IV being brought to her father's castle as a prisoner one Christmas Eve when she was about seven years old. Not only Germany but the whole Christian world had been torn by the long struggle between the Papacy and the Empire. And even although Gregory VII had lately vindicated and established the rights of the Church over the State in spiritual matters, though the first Crusades were being preached, and there was thus on the one hand an evidence of spiritual awakening ; on the other, a growing spirit of worldliness appeared among the clergy, abuses and laxities crept into the monasteries, schisms and heresies were abroad. The times were ready for a reformer ; and that fact undoubtedly lent to Hildegard's visionary life a prophetic bent. She appeared in a time of conflict, and was strong enough to raise

her voice and demand that conflict should cease and the minds of men be set on worthier things.

Her father was Hildebert, Knight-at-arms to Graf von Sponheim, the overlord of Böckelheim. Hildegard was the tenth child, and her parents, remembering Old Testament teaching, resolved to offer her as a tithe to the Lord. She was a solitary and unusual little girl. She was aware of a Light in herself in which she saw wonderful things, but ' because of the hindrances of childhood ' she could say nothing of these marvels.

About a mile to the west of Böckelheim, on another hill, stood the great Benedictine monastery of S. Disibode, so-called after the Irish monk whose staff blossomed there like Aaron's rod and who is said to have evangelized the district and founded the monastery in the seventh century.[1] Graf von Sponheim had one daughter, the learned and saintly Jutta, who had taken a vow in her youth to renounce the world. Her father acquiescing in what was not then an unusual vocation, built a cell for her against the wall of the monastery church, so that through her side window she could look into the church and take part in the offices. And as Hildegard's parents naturally desired that their daughter should be trained under this young religious already famed for her sanctity, on All Saints' Day, 1106, Jutta and Hildegard with a poor cousin of Jutta's who was to wait on them, were set apart with solemn ceremony and immured in their cell on the Disibodenberg.

[1] Though S. Disibode has been canonized, it is only fair to say that doubts as to his existence have been recorded and the name of the monastery derived from *idisi*, i.e. a height dedicated to holy women. This reasoning may of course only prove that our Irishman was known by the name of the height on which he lived. It was in this monastery that the Abbot Trithemius, the teacher of Paracelsus, wrote his learned works.

As Jutta's fame spread with the years and more and more noble maidens came asking to live under her guidance, she was at last forced to leave her cell and form them into a community, a convent being built for them in 1112, in which they lived according to the Benedictine Rule.

Accounts of what Hildegard learned there are contradictory. She could never write German, but then German was hardly a written language in her day. Her *Life*, compiled by two contemporary monks, says that she never learned writing, reading, music, or Latin, but that she knew these things miraculously. Yet, even although Latin moods and tenses remained so troublesome to her that she had to get a monk to correct her grammar, we may put down this insistence on her never having learned anything except by infused knowledge, to an anxiety on the part of her biographers to make her life appear the more miraculous.

For Hildegard was an extraordinarily able and original woman of remarkable intellectual power and unconquerable energy. Considering the books she wrote—which, far from being illiterate, betray much learning and careful study of the works of others—it is clear that she was at least abreast of the knowledge of her time. Even if her grammar were faulty—and here the question of spurious works attributed to her has to be considered—the Latin grammar of well-educated people of our own day is not always above suspicion. She not only recorded three books of symbolic visions, wrote Commentaries on the Gospels, Lives of Saints, a Mystery Play, and composed a considerable quantity of Church music, but she wisely ruled her convents, attended to a large correspondence, and found time to enter the field of science. Her treatise on medicine, while full of the scientific

errors of her time, was described by Virchow as 'curiously complete for the age to which it belonged.'

As to her Church music, she wrote both words and music of sixty-three hymns, interesting to the student of the music of the Middle Ages because they show a tonality different from that ruling the Gregorian Chant. A scholar who has recently made a careful and scientific study of them can find no reason to doubt that these chants and melodies are really the work of Hildegard.[1] While the Gregorian tonality did not go beyond the octave and the note above and below it, what is called the *decachord*, Hildegard's chants do exceed these limits. She thus breaks through the austere formula in which the music of the Church had been fixed for centuries, and her *Carmina* have their place in the history of religious music. If Schumann is right in asserting that the names of women composers could be written on a rose petal, then Hildegard's name must find a place on it.

She was in fact a woman of genius. But although she was gifted in so many different ways, it was her power of prophecy and foresight which filled her contemporaries with awe; a sense of the supernatural shone through everything she did and impressed all with whom she came in contact. Hildegard has been described as a masterful woman. What made her appear so was that from her childhood and all her life long, she saw in the *Living Light* which came to her, revelations which she was interiorly commanded to make known. Sometimes their meaning was obvious; sometimes Hildegard supplied the interpretation. But

[1] Bronarski, *Lieder der heiligen Hildegard*. The great parchment MS. of Hildegard's *Carmina* is to be seen in the Nassau Nationalbibliothek, Wiesbaden.

she was compelled to obey this interior command. When she hesitated, as she did several times from humility and horror of making herself conspicuous, then the interior conflict between the command to reveal and the desire to keep silent, was such that she fell ill. And as soon as she revealed her vision and the interior strain was eased, she recovered.

Her utterances were often sweeping denunciations, recalling the mighty power of the Hebrew Prophets; they were often unpleasant to those whom they concerned, but as Hildegard was regarded as the Tabernacle of the Divine Spirit, her revelations were therefore received as the Voice of God. Deeply conscious of the social evils of her time and equally of the inability of a stagnant Church to deal with them, Hildegard thought an ethic transfused by real religion the only remedy for these evils. Although it was in her old age that she explained to the monk Guibert—who corrected her grammar !—how her visions came to her, we quote the passage here as it largely explains her life :

> God works all things in order, to the manifestation of His glorious name, and not that man, born of the earth, should be thereby exalted. For my part I am always in fear and trembling because I have not any security as to what I am able to do. But I lift up my hands to God, that He may support me as on wings whose flight is beyond comprehension and which soar in the heavens in spite of all contrary winds. That which I see I cannot perfectly know while I am tied down to a body with an invisible soul. Such is the dual defect of man. . . .
>
> From my infancy until now, when I am in the seventieth year of my age, my soul has always beheld this Light, and in it my soul soars to the summit of the firmament and into a different air and spreads itself among different peoples, however remote they may be. Therefore I perceive these things in my soul, as I saw them through dissolving clouds. . . .

I do not hear them with my outer ears, nor perceive them by the ponderings of my heart, nor by any assistance of the five senses, but only in my soul, my eyes being open and not sightless as in a trance. Day or night, I see these things while wide awake. And I am perpetually kept down by my infirmities and by pains so sore as to threaten me with death, but so far God has supported me.

The brightness which I see is not limited by space ; it is more radiant than the luminous air round the sun and I cannot measure its height or length or breadth. Its name which has been given me is *Shade of the Living Light, umbra viventis luminis*. And in the same way that the sun, the moon, and the stars are reflected in water, in that way do I see Scripture, discourses, virtues, and human actions reflected in this Light.

Whatever I see or learn in this Light, I remember : as I have seen or heard it, so I remember it and at once see, hear, and know it. But on the other hand, what I do not see in this Light, that I do not know, because I am unlettered although I have had some simple instruction. I write whatever I see or hear in the Light, nor do I put down any other words, but I tell my message in the rude Latin words I read it in, in the Light. For the Light does not teach me to write as the learned write ; the words in the Light are not like words from human lips but like a flashing flame and a cloud passing through the clear air. . . .

Within that brightness I sometimes see another Light for which the name *Lux Vivens* has been given me. When and how I see it I cannot tell, but sometimes when I see it, all pain and sadness are lifted from me and I seem a simple girl again and no longer an old woman.[1]

When Jutta died in 1136, Hildegard was made prioress. She had now been for thirty years a religious. She had already a reputation for sanctity ; her supernatural gifts led of course to that, but her humility and her selfless, self-denying life were evidently impressive. She was also regarded as an authority on medicine, and the infirmary of her convent must have been a considerable place seeing that it had a chapel of its own. Except when moved to speak by interior command, she seems

[1] *Vie*, i. 2, 11. Pitra, *Analecta S. Hildegardis*, etc., p. 332.

to have been naturally silent. She was patient and uncomplaining, for all her life she suffered from difficult health. The sensitive temperament which goes with genius has to be paid for, and her body felt the strain of the great visions which thrilled through her and 'burned her soul' as she confessed to S. Bernard. She was often in bed for weeks, once for three years, and even when well, she had difficulty in walking. But ill health was not allowed to hinder her work. The old monk Theodoric, in reflecting piously how this 'athlete of God' was purified by suffering, quotes her own words:

'God nailed me down for some time to my bed,' she wrote, 'and filled my body with an affliction such that my veins and my blood, my flesh and my muscles, my marrow and my bones dried up in me as if my soul was about to leave my body and I was in such disorder for thirty days that my skin was as if enwrapped in fire. . . . And my spirit too was sick, so that while I did not die, yet did I not altogether live. In those days I saw an immense army of angels . . . who strove with Michael against the dragon and disputed as to what God had ordained for me. And one of them cried out to me, "Courage, O eagle! Why sleepest thou entangled in vain knowledge? Shake off thy fears! Thou shalt shine, O jewel, in thy splendour." . . . And God comforted me because I bore these sufferings patiently and I said to Him, "O Lord my God! in whatever way Thou smitest me, I will find it good, for I know that all Thy works are good and holy and that I have deserved these things from my infancy. But I know, nevertheless, that my soul will not be thus tormented in the life to come. . . ." Thus was my body seethed as in a pot . . . yet gave I thanks to God, for if this affliction had not been from Him, I had surely not lived so long. But although thus tortured yet did I, in supernal vision, often repeat, cry aloud and write those things which the Holy Spirit willed to put before me. . . .'[1]

But even while thus 'nailed down to her bed,' Hildegard's visions drove her to attack the abuses

[1] *Vie*, ii. III.

of her time with such vigour that a veritable whirlwind seemed to burst out of that small German valley and sweep over the land. Living in the atmosphere of eternity, she was appalled to see the world resting indolently in its foolish vices, neglecting the commands of God to purify itself and spend itself for others. She did not hesitate to rebuke the sins either of the world or the Church. What her visions instructed her to say, she said with no uncertain voice ; she had a mission to fulfil and she fulfilled it with all her might. A prophet and reformer, she was a follower of John the Baptist, a forerunner of S. Catharine of Siena. Her letters often have an almost Apocalyptic character, as here where the neglected Church warns the priests of their fate. The Church speaks :

The princes and the people will fall on you, O Priests, you who have forsaken me up till now. They will drive you out and put you to flight. They will take away your riches because you have neglected your priestly office. . . . And in so doing they will believe themselves to be serving God because you have dishonoured me. . . . But all are not led away by the devil, for there are pastors who are soldiers of God, good and just men. There are also congregations of Saints whose life is pure, who will not allow themselves to be moved.[1]

And this prophet, sometimes called the Sibyl of the Rhine, treated civil power as straightly as ecclesiastical. Read, for instance, the letter she wrote to Frederick Barbarossa. He questioned the authority of the Church, he could not brook its 'tyranny,' but Hildegard's authority he did not question ; he thought her mission of divine origin, and wrote to ask for her blessing. It was with a firm pen that this abbess of an obscure convent rebuked the Roman Emperor :

O King ! it is very needful that thou be foreseeing in thy affairs. For in mystic vision I see thee living, small and in-

[1] *Epist.* xlviii. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 197.

sensate, beneath the Living Eyes of God. Thou hast still some time to reign over earthly matters. Therefore beware lest the Supreme King cast thee down for the blindness of thine eyes, which do not rightly see how thou holdest the rod of right government. See also to it that thou art such that the grace of God may not be lacking in thee.[1]

Hildegard's fame had now spread so widely that multitudes of pilgrims came to see her ; there was something about her which invited confession of sin, something felt by the rich and mighty as well as by the poor. Her advice was asked on every kind of question, her intercessions implored by popes and kings, clergy and commoners (among them our own Henry II and Eleanor his queen, whom she warned to be on her guard against restlessness and inconstancy).

Hildegard answered no questions till she had received interior light upon them, for the answers ' came not out of her own mind ' but had to be seen by her in the Living Light. In most of her questioners she found something to rebuke ; in fact out of the one hundred and fifty letters which have come down to us, that to S. Bernard is the only one containing no rebuke.

He had been preaching a crusade on the Rhine which much impressed her ; she saw him in her Living Light ' as it were an angel which soars up into the sun.' He does not seem to have visited her (though Trithemius says that he did), but there is a pleasing legend that he sent her, by some of his ' grave clergy,' a present of his own penknife with its handle of onyx.[2] She wrote to him ; feeling him in the same line of country with herself, she confessed how the Living Light was like a flame which laid hold of and burned up her soul, how she

[1] Migne, *Epist.* xxvii.
[2] Bouré, *Cantique d'après Sainte Hildegarde*, p. 10.

regarded him with the deepest reverence and veneration, and how she would be grateful for his advice. His reply is interesting as showing what the greatest spiritual personality of her time thought of Hildegard. After modestly putting aside her praise of himself, he goes on—

I congratulate you on the Grace of God which is in you and kindly warn you to be careful to respond to it in a disposition of entire humility and devotion, in order that you may retain this grace. . . . This is the advice which I give to you as far as in me lies and the prayer that I make for you. But what am I, to be able either to teach or to give warning, to one in whom is the secret intuition and the anointing which teaches all things. For you are said to be so favoured as that the hidden things of heaven are revealed to you and that the Holy Spirit makes known to you those things which pass man's understanding. Wherefore I rather entreat and humbly pray that you would make remembrance of me before God and of those who are joined with me in spiritual society. For I trust that when you are united to God in the Spirit, you will be able to profit us much. . . . As for me, I pray for you continually that you may be strengthened in good, that your soul may be perfected and you may be enabled to attain to eternal joys.[1]

It was in the year 1141 that Hildegard's great prophetic period really began, for it was then she began to write down her symbolic visions in a book she called the *Scivias* or *Scito vias Domini, Know the ways of the Lord.* In trying to give an account of these visions M. Franche writes :

We are confounded by their majestic proportions ; they are really a *Summa* of the whole science of the Middle Ages, transcending time, seeking in an eternal way to find and radiate the Light. Everything passes across the field of vision God opens to her soul, in a gigantic procession, as if in an immense kaleidoscope—God and His Nature, the Angels, Paradise Lost, Hell, Man, and the story of the Fall and his redemption, the Prophets, Old and New Testament subjects, Eucharistic mysteries, all reaching a climax in a marvellous picture of the end

[1] *Life and Works of S. Bernard*, iii, p. 915.

of the world. And within this mighty sweep, we come on little intimate discourses on the mysteries of life, on music, medicine, natural science, the virtues of herbs, the destiny of stars; practice is mingled with speculation, poetry with theology, prophecies with scientific views. Speaking in one of her visions of the Tower of Wisdom, she says it reaches up higher and higher into the heavens. At the foot of it those little human beings who are active in speculative science, move to and fro; they come and go but never enter in. Only those who practise their belief may enter in and take their place.[1]

The *Scivias*, Hildegard's greatest work, give evidence of an intimate knowledge of the Hebrew Prophets, the Pauline Epistles, the Apocalypse, and the Book of Wisdom, as well as a slight knowledge of Aristotle and Galen. Her thought has similarity with that of her contemporary, Hugh of St. Victor, and seems often formed by S. Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*.[2] So much for her background. She writes of her visions:

I did not perceive them in dreams or in sleep or in any kind of trance. I did not see them with my bodily eyes nor hear them with the ears of man or in hidden places. But I beheld them according to the will of God, wide awake, considering them in full clearness of the mind, eyes and ears of the inner man. How is this done? It is difficult for carnal man to understand. But having passed my youth and arrived at maturity I heard a voice from heaven which said, 'I am the Living Light which enlightens the darkness. . . . Thou therefore who receivest these things, not in the inquietude of deception but in purity of intention, because they are directed to the manifestation of mysterious things, write what thou seest and hearest! . . . But because thou art timorous in language, unskilled in exposition and ignorant of how to write down these things, say and write them not according to human utterance or understanding, but as thou seest and hearest them

[1] Franche, *Ste Hildegarde*.

[2] For a full discussion of the sources of her scientific knowledge, see Singer, 'Scientific Views and Visions of S. Hildegard.'

in the heavenly splendour in the wonders of God, offering them to others, as the pupil repeats the teaching of his master in his very words, because the master wills it so and shows the pupil how to do it. . . .

And again I heard a voice from heaven which said to me, 'Relate these marvels; write down the things which thou hast learnt and say, In the year 1141 of the Incarnation of the Son of God, at the age of 42 years, 7 months, a fiery light of wondrous brightness coming from the open heavens, dispersed itself all about my Brain and all about my heart and all about my Breast as a flame; yet not such as burns but such as warms, raising in me such a warmth as the Sun does in those things whereon it sheds its rays. And immediately I was illuminated with the understanding and exposition of books, as for instance the Psalter and the Gospels and other Catholic volumes as well of the Old as of the New Testament.'[1]

For nine years Hildegard laboured at this great work in which, although there is no evidence that Dante ever read her writings, she is his true forerunner. It is indeed difficult, as M. Franche says, to give any idea of her visions. They always follow the same general plan. They are all concerned with Light; a blinding radiance, a gentle glow, or stationary or moving stars which illuminate some allegorical figure or landscape which she then minutely describes and interprets. In the Living Light she sees a material and ever-growing form, a mountain, part of the firmament, an abyss, a tower, a silhouette of a beast or a monster. She describes these images with great minuteness and with that wealth of allegory beloved of the Middle Ages. From the midst of this a voice is heard which explains the symbolic significance of it all.

Many of her visions are obscured for us by a conception of the universe peculiar to herself and her time. It has only been possible to interpret them thanks to the fact that in her lifetime, and probably under her direction, illuminated copies

[1] *Scivias*, Preface.

of her writings were made with miniature illustrations in which the artist has made a brave and intelligent effort to illustrate theological ideas. By a circle of gold inside a circle of silver, for instance, he represents the heavenly Father and the Holy Spirit; the Word Incarnate he represents by the human form of Christ in the centre, indicating by the praying attitude and the radiant sapphire blue His redemptive and intercessory functions and the glorious state of His henceforth celestial body.

To Hildegard, as illustrated by these miniature illustrations,[1] the universe was an egg-shaped sphere, composed of earth, air, fire, and water enfolded by a covering layer of atmosphere. This again was enwrapped by the winds (i.e. the breath of supernatural beings), while enclosing the whole was an outer ring of fire. Before the Fall, these elements worked together in harmony, but the Fall threw them into confusion from which they never recovered—'though the day of the Lord shall come. . . . We look for a new heaven and a new earth.' These movements of the winds and elements of the outer universe, Hildegard related to the movements within the physical body of man; and in her last work she brought her theological and physiological beliefs into one great system, giving us thus an epitome of the science of her time, 'a systematic and skilful presentment of a cosmic theory'[2] which persisted for centuries.

Fascinating as this subject is, it does not concern us here. If Hildegard's theory of the universe was

[1] Reproductions of many of those miniatures are to be found in Singer, 'Scientific Views and Visions of S. Hildegard' in *Studies in the History and Method of Science*. Also in a paper by Dom Louis Baillet, *Miniatures du Scivias de Ste. Hildegard*. The chief MSS. themselves are in Wiesbaden, Heidelberg, and Lucca.

[2] Singer, op. cit., p. 31.

based on the incomplete knowledge of her time, her spiritual teaching and the writings in which she imparts it, were based on personal experience of the Changeless and Eternal God.

Her other great visionary works are the *Liber Vitae Meritorum* and the *Liber Divinorum Operum Simplicis Hominis*. She announces in them that God is wearied of the iniquities of His people, that the Day of Judgement is at hand when Christianity will rise up against itself and destroy itself. Again and again she protests that she has no part in these declarations: 'Wisdom instructed me in consuming me with flames of Love . . . I did not say these things of myself; it was Wisdom who said them. . . .'

She gives lurid accounts of the punishment of the wicked. The tortures of the uncharitable she sees 'as a great fire, black and red and white, and in it the most horrible fiery vipers spitting flame, and there the vipers tortured the souls of those who had been the slaves of the sin of uncharitableness.' Those guilty of envy and malice 'suffered in a hollow mountain full of fire and vipers . . . crawling with scorpions.' She must have suffered from foolish people for 'she saw a great swamp over which hung a black cloud of smoke. And in the swamp there swarmed a mass of little worms. Here were the souls of those who in the world had delighted in inept laughter.' [1]

We need not follow her through all the punishments of the wicked, passages which inevitably remind us of Dante's *Inferno*. Her description of the Judgement ends thus:

> And the judgement being finished the lightnings and the thunder and the winds and tempests ceased; and whatsoever was transitory in the elements suddenly vanished and the

[1] Pitra, op. cit., pp. 92, 131, 51.

greatest tranquillity prevailed. Then the elect suddenly became splendid above the splendour of the sun and sought heaven with the Son of God and the blessed angels in great joy. . . . And there was no night but day. And it was finished.[1]

She has no descriptions of the joys of the blessed because their spiritual achievement is their beauty, and that cannot be explained seeing that it passes human understanding.

There is a beautiful allegory of the Trinity in the Second Book of the *Scivias* :

And then I saw a most lovely light and in it a human form of sapphire hue which glowed with a most tender and gentle fire, and that lovely light transfused the gentle fire and the fire transfused the lovely light and both fire and light transfused that human form—all together forming one light, one virtue, and one power.

Her last work, the *Divine Works of a Simple Man*, she begins with this great vision :

I saw a fair human form (Nature) and the countenance thereof was of such beauty and brightness that it had been easier to gaze upon the sun. The head thereof was girt with a golden circlet through which appeared another face as of an aged man. (The Godhead.) From the neck of the figure on either side sprang a pinion which swept upward above the circlet and joined its fellow on high. . . . The figure was robed in brightness as of the sun while the hands held a lamb shining with light. Beneath, the feet trampled a horrible black monster of revolting shape, upon the right ear of which a writhing serpent fixed itself.[2]

Thus is the power of evil, held at bay by the power of good. And a little further on comes this impressive declamation by the Holy Spirit :

I am the fiery life of the substance of God who kindled all living sparks. Death hath no part in me, yet do I allot it,

[1] *Scivias*, III. xiii.

[2] *Liber Divinorum Operum*, etc. Migne, *Patrologia Latina*, vol. 197, col. 741.

wherefore I am girt about with wisdom as with wings. I am that living and fiery essence of the divine substance that flows in the beauty of the fields. I shine in the water, I burn in the sun and the moon and the stars. Mine is that mysterious force of the invisible wind. I sustain the breath of all living beings. I breathe in the verdure and in the flowers, and when the waters flow like living things, it is I. I formed these columns that support the whole earth. . . . I am the force that lies hid in the winds, from me they take their source and as a man may move because he breathes, so doth a fire burn by my blast. All these live because I am in them and am of their life. I am Wisdom. Mine is the blast of the thundered word by which all things were made. I permeate all things that they may not die. I am life.[1]

Alongside such great metaphysical apprehensions we find a deep devotion to the Word Incarnate who bent down through love to put on man's low estate:

The Son of God clothed Himself in a human body without any contagion of sin, in the similitude of the beauty of the sun, for as the sun shines at such great height above other creatures that by no man is he able to be touched, so also no human knowledge, unless united to faith, is able to understand the humanity of the Son of God. . . .

In the strength of the unending Divinity is the love of the Father on high . . . showing that when the Son of God put on flesh, He redeemed lost man through love. . . . The excellent goodness of the Divinity . . . reaches the highest charity when the Son of God in His humanity brings back lost men to heaven. . . . Through His footsteps, true charity treads down the injury of discord.

While Hildegard was engaged in all this writing —and her scientific works we have not of course considered—she did not neglect her other duties. In 1148 she had a vision which commanded her to leave the convent where she then was and go with her nuns to the Rupertsburg near Bingen. But as she did not at once make this command known, she fell ill; 'I suffered,' she writes, 'in my

[1] Migne, op. cit., col. 743.

eyes and by a great heaviness of my body which I could not shake off.' She remained ill till she boldly rose up and, going against the wishes of her superior, went with twenty noble maidens to the place her vision had ordained. She left a green and fertile land to go to an inhospitable place 'where there was nothing.' 'But God willed,' she says, 'that I should strongly persevere and not cease my efforts, even though in this life, He should not give me any assurance to revive my courage.' [1]

The community on the Rupertsburg continued to grow, and in 1165, when she had already begun her last visionary work, she had to found a new convent at Eibingen on the other side of the Rhine.

There was thus nothing of the idle contemplative about Hildegard. While deeply interested in the politics of her time, in which she did not disdain to use her immense influence, while actively working for the reform of churches and convents, while being a wise and careful mother to her nuns and to those numerous others who sought her advice outside her convent walls, she continued to write and prophesy and heal the sick—for 'she was well-versed in medicine and skilled in the use of herbs,' her *Physica* being a treatise on their nature and use. Her anatomy and physiology are interesting for the light they shed on the contemporary conception of these sciences.

While space forbids any lengthy quotation from her anatomical dissertations, the following realistic description of what man may feel in his body can hardly be resisted :

> The humours at times rage fiercely as a leopard and again they are softened going backwards as a crab ; or they may show their diversity by leaping and goring as a stag, or they

[1] *Vie*, ii. 22, 23.

may be as a wolf in their ravening, and yet again they may invade the body of man after the manner of both wolf and crab. Or else they may show forth their strength unceasingly as a lion or as a serpent may go now softly now violently, and at times they may be gentle as a lamb, and at times again they may growl as an angered bear, and at times they may partake of the nature both of the lamb and the serpent.

Thus, though Hildegard's day might begin with a vision of transcendent light, it might end with a cure for earache ; nothing was beyond the scope of this strong woman ' who could scold emperors and archbishops in powerful if not classical Latin and could physic the poor of the Rhineland with the success of a medical missionary . . . and the hand which wielded the crozier of the abbess and the pestle of the apothecary, could also wield the pen of the dramatist and the whip of the Minor Prophet.' [1]

It was natural, seeing what a power Hildegard had now become, that when Pope Eugenius III held a synod at Treves in the winter of 1148, the question of her position and her visions should be discussed. The Bishop of Verdun, with several other ecclesiastics, was sent to interview the prophetess. They returned bringing some of her writings with them, deeply impressed by the simple humility with which she had received them, impressed above all by the other-worldly radiance which seemed to surround and emanate from her.

The Bishop of Verdun told the Pope he was convinced her visions were of divine origin. ' I found her, Holy Father,' he said, ' as a flaming torch which our Lord has lighted in His Church.' ' Then we must not put it under a bushel,' the Pope is reported to have said. And S. Bernard, who was present, declared that ' the Fountain of

[1] Steele, op. cit., p. x.

all true knowledge was to be found in her writings.' These were then read to the Synod which unanimously declared them to be inspired, and the Pope wrote to her, rejoicing that God had performed fresh miracles in filling her with His Spirit so that she was able to 'see, comprehend, and give utterance to, many mysteries.' And he gave his sanction to her change of abode. Hildegard, in answering this letter, tells him the writing of the *Scivias* is finished.

But the same Light which has not abandoned me still burns in my soul as in the first days of my childhood. That is why I send you these letters as a veritable message from God. And my soul desires that the Light of Lights should shine forth in you, illumine your sight to the comprehension of these writings to the end that it may please God that your soul may be crowned because of the merit of this work; because many learned in this world have thought fit to refute these writings having regard to the frailty of this female form, fashioned from the rib of man and having no philosophic knowledge. You, therefore, O Father of Pilgrims, hear the voice of Him who is the All-Powerful King. . . . For it has pleased Him to touch this poor soul that it may take wing in miracles and His mighty breath has sustained it that it fall not. And now, He who is the Living Light from on high . . . He says to you anew, 'Disclose these writings . . . and give them a sweet and pleasant savour; spread them out that their branches and their foliage may serve as a refuge against the evil one and you shall live for ever!'[1]

Hildegard was conscious of her vocation, aware that the All-Powerful King was supporting her. To herself she was merely a frail woman. There was no question of imposing her own will on others; she was merely the mouthpiece of the Living Light.

'Self-elation,' she said, 'is a steep and dizzy height on which there is no room to build. That poor man is very foolish who, when he knows that his garment is soiled, looks at others and reflects on the appearance of their clothes, instead of washing

[1] Migne, *Epist.*

his own. Those who would do the work of God must think what they are and what they will soon be—mere vessels of earth in that they are mortal men ignorant of heavenly things. They are as trumpets, uttering the secret things of God, not as of themselves but as another breathes into them.'

The fact that the Pope believed in her and that S. Bernard was her friend, added to her influence. They on their side saw how greatly she could help their work of reforming the Church, the more that she always proclaimed her message as coming from a supernatural source.

Another contemporary testimony as to the place this oracle held in the opinion of her time is that of Elizabeth of Schönau, the abbess of a Benedictine convent not far from the Rupertsburg. She was Hildegard's spiritual daughter; she too was a visionary and a prophetess, and though they seldom met they frequently exchanged letters.

'My lady Hildegard,' she wrote, 'rightly art thou called Hildegard (thorn of strife) [1] for the thorn of the Lord works in thee with marvellous power for the rebuilding of His Church. Be strong in the Holy Ghost! Blessed art thou,

[1] It is difficult to reconcile Elizabeth's interpretation of Hildegard's name with that of modern authorities. I have found it interpreted as *schirmende Heldenjungfrau*, a protecting, heroic guardian. But Scherer, in his *Deutsche Literaturgeschichte* tells us that in early German, women's names fell naturally into two groups, the first connected with Nature and Beauty, implying attraction, charm, and the more feminine virtues; the second including the eager fighters, the weapon and torchbearing heroines who took victory by storm. Hildegard belongs of course to the latter group. While every interpretation of her name connects it with effort or struggle, modern students regard it as signifying one who restrains from battle and prevents conflict. *Hilde* is probably derived from the O.H.G. *hilt* meaning war, battle; while *gard* comes from the O.H.G. *warten* and the Germanic *wardan*, meaning guard or defender. On the other hand the O.H.G. *ger* and the A.S. *gar* mean a dart or pointed weapon, which would explain Elizabeth's 'thorn of strife.'

for the Lord hath chosen thee and set thee up as one of those of whom He says, *I have appointed ye that ye should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.*'

Hildegard answers her, warning her to keep calm and humble, setting aside her disciple's praise of herself:

I, a poor little earthen vessel, say these things, not of myself but through the Living Light. . . . Those who desire to do the works of God should always remember that they are fragile, earthen vessels. They should put on the breast-plate of Faith and be humble and poor, living as He did, the Lamb Whose trumpet-sound they are. They should have the simplicity of a little child whom God keeps in His care, lest it should allow its tool to fall on the ground.

O daughter! may God make thee a mirror of Life![1]

Having firmly established her convent on the Rupertsburg, where she ultimately ruled over sixty nuns, Hildegard set out in 1150 'to reveal the words spoken by God to other monasteries.' She travelled all over Germany wherever the Spirit led her. She rode on horseback with an armed escort, for the roads were unsafe.

In these apostolic journeys she expended her whole strength in the attempt to infuse spiritual ardour into a lukewarm Church. She had a gift of oratory, and would go up into the pulpit in her black Benedictine habit—she only wore white on great festivals—and those who heard her were carried away by the fire of her inspiration. She did not weigh her words when the Living Light instructed her to condemn abuses in convents or worldliness in the clergy. She was a real influence, not only in Germany, where she corresponded with most of the leading ecclesiastics, but also in Holland and Flanders, and indeed all over Central

[1] Migne, *Epist.* This translation is quoted from Steele, *Life and Visions of S. Hildegard*, p. 15.

Europe. It was not till 1173 that she travelled in France: her writings are said to have been laid before the Doctors of the Faculty of Paris, who declared them to be inspired. She made her way home, but she was then over eighty years old and had not long to live.

Her last public action was characteristic of her courage and independence, her love of justice. She allowed the body of a youth, who had lived at war with the Church, but whom she considered to have died in obedience to it, to be buried in her convent cemetery. But the ecclesiastical authorities refused to admit that the youth had submitted to the Church: they declared that either his body must be removed from consecrated ground or Hildegard must incur the ban of the Church. The old abbess defended the rights of her spiritual son; she withstood the Pope and the bishops; she drew a cross on the grave with her staff and obliterated lines which had been drawn to divide it from other graves. For months she bore the ban of the Church with all the precious deprivations that implied; no Mass could be said, no office recited in the convent church, the bells might not be rung. Hildegard bore all that rather than desecrate the grave or allow that the youth had died in sin. Finally in the summer of 1179 the ban was withdrawn.

Not long after she passed gently from the Shadow of the Living Light into that *Lux Vivens* she had so loved and served:

> And again I heard a voice from heaven teaching me these words. Now praise be to God in His work, that is man, for whose reparation He fought an exceeding great battle and whom He deigned to raise to heaven that, together with the angels, he may praise His face Who is true God and man. But this omnipotent God in His mercy deigned to anoint with oil the poor little woman through whom this writing

is published, because she lived without any confidence in herself. . . .

But from the day of her birth she was entangled in a net of suffering and illnesses, so that she was vexed with continual pains in all her veins and flesh to the very marrow. Yet it did not please God that she should be dissolved, because within her soul she had seen spiritually certain mystical things of God. But this vision so pierced through the veins of this woman that she was often afflicted with great weariness. . . . She never had any confidence in herself, nor any sense of security, otherwise the inspiration of the Holy Spirit would not have dwelt in her so powerfully. But the Spirit of God, in the great strength of His love, sometimes raised her up by this means from death, as by a refreshing dew, so that she was able to live in the world as a servant of God with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. And Almighty God who knew truly all the weariness of the suffering of this woman, deigned to perfect His grace in her that His love might be glorified in her, that when her soul should migrate from this world to eternal glory, it should rejoice to be mercifully received and crowned by Him.

This passage, with its insistence on her humility, how she never had any confidence in herself but was only able to live in the world and proclaim what the Spirit taught her, *because* the Holy Spirit supported her, explains the secret of Hildegard's life. It does not surprise us to read that she spent much time in prayer. All her activities were occasioned and supported by that constant, deep, life-giving contemplation from which she drew all her power.

'The love of God and our neighbour . . . are not to be separated,' she says. 'Those given corporally to the world, nevertheless continually serve God in the spirit; neither do they, on account of being detained in the world, forget those things which are of the spirit in communing with God. And their faces are turned towards the east because both religious and seculars who desire to walk with God and to preserve their souls in life, ought to turn themselves to the bringing forth of . . . sanctity.'

Hildegard 'harnessed her fiery energies to the

service of the Light.' Her religion was a glowing, leaping fire which in its ardour burned up the physical body through which it flamed. And yet she lived through nearly the whole of the twelfth century; her communion with the Living Light sustained her through such sufferings and activities as able-bodied women might well shrink from. How often she confesses she is 'tormented with fever . . . burned up within.' And yet, she says, 'Although I was constantly in great suffering, I gave myself up nevertheless to the contemplation of heavenly things that they might instruct me.'

Her life seems to point the lesson that neither the present nor the future are to be despaired of, seeing that both are in the hands of God. Personal intercourse with her confirmed the general belief in her direct experience of the Divine. Her own consciousness of vocation and prophetic power increased as she grew older. She was supported by many visions assuring her of this, such, for instance, as that in which she saw a concourse of saints, and heard them encourage her and cheer her on in these words:

> Arise, Daughter of the Morning! O happy and faithful soul, arise! Soar aloft as the eagle, for without that thou knowest it, the Sun of Light hath begotten thee!

Such exhortations sometimes appear as veritable paeans of delight thrilling through her:

> Sing, Daughter of the Morning! Sing, Voice of the Word! Sing while thou obeyest, thou in whom God proclaims Himself, He Who is Eternal Power and Life, that Life which rescues from falsehood. . . .
>
> Sing! Daughter of the Morning, in whose adoration is formed the splendour of the Principle which reforms the world. O thou! pray thou in Him! Behold Him in thyself, thy Pardon and thy Redemption![1]

[1] Bouré, *Cantique d'après Ste. Hildegarde*, p. 119.

And yet, after the mighty sweep of such a music, we come gladly back to a simple little saying which shows us the prophetess and oracle as a humble woman who loved to reflect how the Eternal and Incomprehensible God had stooped down to enter the lowly human heart:

'*The love of God created us*,' we seem to hear her say quietly, '*but the humility of God saved us*.' [1]

[1] Migne, *Epist.* 30.

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MECHTHILD OF MAGDEBURG

1212–1280 *circa.*

WE have unfortunately no knowledge as to the exact birthplace or parentage of this deeply poetic and spiritual woman. But we do know that she was born somewhere near Magdeburg, and it is evident from her language, her general air of freedom and independence, and her knowledge of the knightly poetry of her time, that she belonged to the ruling class. To understand her life we must remember the cultural background from which she sprang.

The thirteenth century was a time of stirrings and impulses; of epic poetry and heroic sagas; of joy in nature, birds, and flowers. But it was also a time of spiritual awakening. The new-born joy in natural beauty was transfused with mystic longing; men eagerly sacrificed all their earthly possessions to win back the Holy Sepulchre for Christendom.

S. Francis and S. Dominic were still living when Mechthild was born; their Orders were established in Germany when she was a child, as well as many houses of the Cistercian Order. S. Elizabeth of Hungary, born five years earlier than Mechthild, married into the reigning house of Thuringia and spent her short life of 'joy in suffering for love' not far from where Mechthild herself was born and grew up and lived.

In Italy, S. Francis had raised the romantic feeling for beauty to spiritual heights; now too, in

Germany, literature began to express the longing of the age for spiritual things. And this longing became vocal through the daughters of the nobility whose education and literary knowledge provided this spiritual tendency with an instrument through which it might express itself. While the young nobles gave themselves to knightly exercises and rode off to the Crusades, their sisters served the celestial chivalry, and through their creative art influenced not only their own but future generations. Their contemporaries thought them inspired; and while their writings are important both as literature and as art, they are most impressive as the medium through which an overwhelming devotion to Christ found expression.

Of this romantic and visionary tendency Thuringia seems to have been the centre, Mechthild of Magdeburg the brightest and strongest spirit. She led a sheltered life, knowing nothing 'of the wickedness of the world or the falseness of people called spiritual' (iv. 2).[1]

It was when she was about twelve years old that she received her first 'greeting from the Holy Spirit,' a greeting 'repeated day after day and filling her with love and sorrow.' The centre of her interest was changed from that time; but although the world no longer had a first claim on her, seeing that she now looked beyond it, Mechthild never became austere or withdrawn from her fellow-beings. She 'saw God in all things and all things in God.' As her *Flowing Light* said to her:

> I come to my love
> As dew on the flowers. (i. 13.)

As a young girl she longed to be despised, 'with-

[1] Such references are to Mechthild's own book, *Das fließende Licht der Gottheit.*

out any fault of her own.' The spirit of the mendicant friars seems to have smitten her, for when she left home at the age of twenty-three to lead a life of 'rapt religious mendicancy,' renouncing worldly honour and riches for Christ's sake, it was not long after the deaths of Francis and Dominic; the world still rang with their words. Elizabeth of Hungary had just died in her Franciscan habit, after a life sacrificed to God and His poor. These examples must have meant a great deal to Mechthild.

She was the 'best-beloved' of her family and yet she left home to go to Magdeburg 'where no one was her friend save one alone.' And that one she was afraid to go near because she knew he would urge her to give up her 'mad resolution'—as indeed it must have appeared from a worldly point of view—and go home. But to herself, her call was quite clear. She tried to enter a convent but she was unknown, she had no money, and it was the custom for daughters of the nobility to be conducted to the convent gates by their parents and handed over with some ceremony, not to mention the dowry needful for the livelihood of the community. It is in accordance with Mechthild's desire to be despised to think that she purposely dispensed with this parental backing. It has also to be remembered that there was in her day a clearly felt desire to walk in the very footsteps of Christ, a desire often translated into action.

She now began to live as a Beguine, that is to say a member of a community of women who devoted themselves to religion without entering a convent or taking monastic vows. In Germany this lay Order was largely adopted by the mendicant friars. Mechthild had most to do with the Dominicans; S. Dominic she loved 'above all

other saints' (iv. 20); her brother Baldwin was a Dominican as well as many of her friends.

It was following the strain and excitement of her refusal by the convent, that she had her first ecstasy or vivid experience of God. She felt her life to be utterly in His hands, and seeing that He had refused to admit her to a convent, that she was now left alone and without resources, she gently rebukes Him. 'Ah! Love!' she complains, 'Thou hast taken from me all earthly honour and riches!' Love answers that she has made a blessed exchange. She has given up her childhood, but she has received the freedom of heaven. She has given up her youth, but she is adorned with all the virtues. She has given up friends, position, riches; all that will be made good to her in one short hour. She has been so pressed and straitened that she has become ill—but she has gained much heavenly wisdom. Her flesh and blood are dried up in her—but she is enlightened and caught up to God. She is rewarded for all that she has renounced by the gift of God Himself and His whole kingdom (i. 1).

Writing later of the experiences of these months, she says:

> God never left me, but brought me such sweetness of love, such heavenly wisdom, such unimaginable wonders, that I had little use for earthly things. Then first was my spirit brought out of itself and set between heaven and earth. Then the eyes of my soul beheld the beautiful manhood of our Lord Jesus Christ in heavenly bliss and knew Him by His shining countenance; also the Holy Trinity, the Eternity of the Father, the work of the Son, and the sweetness of the Holy Spirit. And I saw the angel to whom I was dedicated at baptism and the devil. . . . Then our Lord spake: 'I will take this one angel from thee and give thee two. They shall care for thee when thou art rapt above the earth.' And when the soul saw the two angels, ah! how it shrank into itself in humility and flung itself down at the feet of our Lord and bewailed its unworthiness, that such spirits should be its guardians. For

the one angel was a Seraphim to enlighten the spirit and set its love on fire, and the other was a Cherub to guard its talents and keep order in that love-distracted soul. (iv. 1.)

Then the Lord brought forward two devils trained in the school of Lucifer, one to tempt Mechthild to allow herself to be venerated on account of the favours God bestowed on her, the other to tempt her to give way to animal satisfactions, for as she frankly tells us, both her spiritual experience and her human nature were causes of grave temptation to her.

When I began to lead a spiritual life and took leave of the world, I looked at my body ; it was heavily armed against my poor soul with a plenty of might and with the full powers of nature. (iv. 2.)

She saw that if she wanted to escape everlasting death she must utterly conquer self. Then she looked to her spirit :

And I saw that the weapons furnished to my spirit were the sufferings and death of Christ. . . . And the mighty Love of God struck me so sore with its wonders that I could no longer keep silent.

Yet though she could not contain the wonders that had been shown her but had to share and write down her revelations, she feared for her humility :

'Ah ! merciful God ! ' she cried, ' what hast Thou seen in me ? Thou knowest I am but a poor little creature ! Such things as these should be made known to the wise ! '

But God rebuked her lack of trust :

' Tell Me,' He said, ' art thou not truly Mine ? '
' Yea, Lord ! that I do ask of Thee, that I be truly Thine ! '
' Must I then not do with thee what I will ? '
' Yea, Lord ! and gladly, even should I come to naught ! '
' Then must thou follow Me and trust Me in these things ! '
' Then,' says Mechthild, ' went I, poor trembling wretch that I was, in humble shame to my Confessor and told him all this.

He told me I should go gladly forward, that God who had asked this of me would keep me from going astray. Then he commanded me that for which I often weep for shame, for my great unworthiness stands ever before my eyes, that I, a poor mean little woman, should write this book out of God's Heart and Mouth.' (iv. 2.)

The book which thus resulted was not only one of the literary treasures of the Middle Ages, it is one of the most individual contemplative books we have. For while many of her contemporaries found God only, or chiefly, in external religion, in the Church and the saints, Mechthild regarded these as aids to that immediate experience of God which was granted to her.

She was deeply conscious that she achieved such communion with God, only through His grace. It was revealed to her that the little human creature bears within itself a spark of the Divine Fire which cannot rest till it is merged in that Energizing Force whence it came ; that the true Home of the soul is in God alone, in Him only can the longing, striving spirit find rest. And it can only attain to this union through the sacrifice of Christ ; no efforts, no conquests of its own can suffice, though these must be fully made ; the death of Christ alone has opened the gates of heaven.

This doctrine we find scattered through all the seven parts of her book, a book which is really a collection of visions, parables, reflections, letters, poems, dialogues.[1] She wrote it down on loose

[1] Written originally in Low German, her book was translated into Latin by a Dominican Friar who ' dearly loved the gift of the Lord in Sister Mechthild.' It must have been in that form that Dante saw it, if indeed he ever did see it. In the fourteenth century it was translated into Middle High German, and this MS. was discovered in the Convent of Einsiedeln in 1861 and published at Regensburg in 1869, both in Middle High German and Modern German.

sheets of paper just as it came to her. She found it difficult to put into words the ineffable things she had to say:

For that which the eye can see and the ear can hear and the mouth can speak, is as unlike the truth which is revealed to the soul who loves, as a candle is to the glorious sun. Of the heavenly things which God has shown me I can speak but a little word, not more than the honey-bee can carry away on its foot from an overflowing jar. . . . I commend these writings, O Lord, to Thy tender mercy. . . . I pray that they may never be read by a Pharisee, and I pray also that Thy children may so receive them into their souls as Thou hast of Thy truth given out of Thy store to me. . . . The writing of this book was heard and explained in every limb of my body by the power of the Holy Ghost. I see it with the eyes of my soul and hear it with the ears of my eternal spirit. (ii. 26; iv. 13.)

Mechthild wrote in alternate prose and verse, a form much used in her time. In the midst of a long prose discourse, she bursts out into poetry, sometimes she writes her whole chapter in verse. Her thought is clear with that humble and child-like simplicity which suddenly soars to the heights. She deals with all lovely natural things, but her feeling for every beauty, of ocean and mountain, tree and flower, animal and insect, is transfused by that mighty Love which was her life. She is never tiresomely devout, never narrow or constrained; there is a spaciousness and nobility about her, an aliveness, even a sense of humour. She suffered from many of our own frailties; she was, for instance, as apt to be impatient with bores as we are, but she managed this unfortunate tendency better.

'That which hinders spiritual people more than anything else,' she says, 'is the little importance they attach to small faults. I tell you in truth that when I neglect a pleasant laugh that would have hurt nobody or when I allow bitterness in my heart—even without showing it in word or action—or

when I feel a little impatience in pain, then my soul becomes so dark and my mind so dull and my heart so cold, that I have to go and confess my sin with shame and tears. I feel like a dog that has been beaten till I creep back humbly again into the mercy and love of God.' (v. 33.)

Love is the foundation of Mechthild's book. 'I was created in Love,' she says, 'therefore nothing can console me or set free my nobility, save love alone.' But she means no idle, self-seeking love:

Of what use is it to love God if we are grim and forbidding to our neighbours? Listen! virtue is half a gift from God, half a reward of our own effort. So that when God gives us understanding and desire to live well, we must cultivate and use the virtues. (vi. 30.)

Thus, driven through love to strip itself of earthly satisfactions and raise its whole being to higher levels, the soul ascends at last, through Christ, to God Himself, in Whom it is merged as water in wine, in Whom every imperfection is perfected.

'It is a wondrous and lofty way in which the soul walks,' she writes, 'leading the senses after it as a man with sight might lead one who was blind. The soul is free in this way and travels without grief in its heart, seeing that it wills nothing but what its Lord wills who does everything for the best.' (i. 26.)

Mechthild insists also that not only does the soul need and long for God, but God needs and longs for the soul.

Before the world began I longed for thee,
I need thee and thou needest Me.
When two burning desires come together
Then is Love perfected.[1] (vii. 16.)

Her insistence on the delight of the Lord in the hungry soul that longs for Him, His desire for and pleasure in the little human creature He has made,

[1] As it is beyond the power of the present writer to translate Mechthild's poetry into verse, her lines are merely put into English prose.

we shall find again in Julian of Norwich with whom Mechthild has much in common.

She asked God what she should call her book—

'Ah! Lord! who has made this book? I have made it out of my weakness because I dared not neglect the task imposed upon me. What shall it be called to Thy sole glory?'

And the Lord answered her, 'It shall be called *A flowing Light of My Godhead* into all hearts which are without falseness.' (i. 1.)

This mention of falseness leads us to her prophetic and critical side in which the mantle of S. Hildegard seems to have fallen on her. She was interiorly forced to record grave criticism of the Church and the clergy, their ignorance, their lukewarmness, their immorality. And in contrast with her own vivid awareness of the overwhelming and compelling Might and Majesty and Joy of the Lord, the so-called Christianity of the world in which she lived appalled her. Yet there was no lack of humility in herself:

Then I, poor creature as I was, was so bold as to lift up the whole of corrupt Christendom in the arms of my soul and hold it up with lamentation before the Lord, and He said:

'Let be! it is too heavy for thee!'
And I made answer,
'Nay! my Lord,
I will lift it up
And bear it to Thee,
And put it in Thine arms
Which bore it on the Cross.'

And God let me have my will
That so I might find rest.

But this poor Christendom, when it appeared before the Lord, seemed to me as a poor maiden. And I was bitterly ashamed of her. And the Lord said: 'Is it seemly that I take this maiden to Me? She is blind in belief, lame in her hands which do no good works, crippled in her feet with evil desires, she thinks seldom and idly of Me, she is impure and unclean.' (v. 34.)

But Mechthild did not limit herself to such general denunciations ; she urged the newly appointed Dean of Magdeburg to mortify himself, to wear rough clothing, to sleep on straw—though between blankets—to keep two bundles of rods beside his bed to discipline himself with when he awoke (vi. 2, 3). She thought those who should have been leaders in the Church, ' the great he-goats,' were the greatest sinners, and she prayed that they might ' become as lambs,' that they might keep themselves always in fear ' like a mouse that sits in a trap and awaits its death.' There is a great passage in which she later lamented the evil days on which the Church had fallen :

Alas ! O crown of Holy Church, how dim art thou become ! Thy precious stones, thy rulers and doctors are fallen. Thy gold is dimmed in the filth of evil desires, thou art become poor, thou hast no true love. Thy purity is burnt up in the consuming fire of greed, thy humility is sunk in the swamp of the flesh. The righteousness of thy truth is brought to naught, the flowers of virtue have fallen from thee. Alas ! for the fallen crown of the priesthood ! How art thou bowed down ! For thee there remains nothing but ruin, for thou makest war upon God and upon His friends ! Therefore will God humble thee, His vengeance will come upon thee on a day that thou knowest not. For thus saith the Lord : ' I will open the ear of the Sovereign Pontiff and touch his heart with grief and holy zeal ; for the shepherds of My sheep from Jerusalem have become robbers and wolves in My sight. They cruelly slay and devour My lambs ; the older sheep are sick and feeble, for they call them back from fruitful pastures and impiously forbid them to feed on the high mountains and green meadows, taking heed with threats and admonitions lest they should be fostered with sound doctrine and salutary counsels of men illustrious in faith and knowledge. If any one is ignorant of the way to the depths below, let him look at the life and character of the depraved priesthood who are hastening straight towards hell. . . .

' Therefore is there need that the younger brethren come, for when the mantle is old, it covers no longer, nor keeps out the cold. Therefore must I take away the old mantle and give

My Bride, holy Christendom, a new mantle; this shall be the younger brethren as has been written. If thou, son Pope, shouldst bring this to pass, thy days may be lengthened. For that the Popes before thee lived short lives was because they did not fulfil My will. . . .'

And it was as if I saw the Pope at his prayers and God thus speaking to him. (vi. 21.)

These younger brethren were, of course, the Dominican and Franciscan Friars, and Mechthild is probably influenced here by the doctrine of the Abbot Joachim of Flora who, in the end of the twelfth century, preached the coming of the Kingdom of the Spirit and prophesied that the place of a corrupt and worldly clergy would be taken by friars who were saintly and walked barefoot, a prophecy held to be fulfilled by the coming of Francis and Dominic and their friars.

Mechthild did not even spare the theology of her day:

'Pure holy simplicity,' she wrote, 'is the mother of all real knowledge of God. All other knowledge is born of human understanding; many misguided laymen, false clergy, and foolish people are taken in by it. . . . Those who would know much and love little, will remain ever at but the beginning of a godly life. . . . Simple love, with even but little knowledge, can do great things.'

It was not to be expected that such outspoken frankness should be popular with the clergy or with those 'lukewarm Christians' whom she regarded as worse than sinners. Mechthild's writings naturally aroused fierce opposition; there was even talk of burning them. She writes after hearing that rumour:

Then did I what from childhood I had done. Whenever sorrow came upon me, then was I bidden inwardly to pray. 'Yea, Lord!' I said,' now am I troubled for Thy Name's sake. Thou wilt not leave me comfortless. Thou hast brought me to this pass, for Thou Thyself commanded me to write these

things.' Then God appeared to my weary soul, and holding my book in His hands He said, 'My Beloved! fret not thyself too sore. The truth may no man burn!' . . . And yet I said to Him: 'O Lord! if it were a learned clerk to whom Thou hadst shown these wonders, then might I write to bring Thee eternal glory! But how canst Thou build a golden house in a muddy pool?' . . . And He answered, 'When I give the gifts of My grace, I seek for the lowest and the smallest and the most unnoticed. It is not on the high mountains that men drink of the water-springs, for the stream of My Holy Spirit flows downwards to the humble valleys.' (ii. 26.)

Mechthild was too deeply convinced of her vocation to be afraid, but the persecution that broke out around her forced her to change her way of life. 'For more than twenty years,' she laments, imploring the sympathy of S. Laurence, 'was I bound with thee on a hideous gridiron!' She prayed for those whom she called her 'Christian tormentors,' but she did not withdraw her judgement of them. They were 'caught in darkness'; they were 'like cattle shoving each other about in a dark shed, and straw was the only thing of any use to cattle' (ii. 19). That there were clear and radiant spirits in the Church too, she did not deny, but 'that the eagle is able to soar, is no thanks to the owl' (vi. 2).

Though Mechthild had often longed to 'spill her blood under the feet of the heretics' she was so convinced of her interior call to write down what came to her, that she felt she must spend her last years where she could find quiet to complete her book. She was now in poor health. She could no longer live alone and so she made up her mind to again seek admission to some convent. Hearing of the fervour of the Cistercian nuns of Helfde, near Eisleben, she went there.

Helfde has been described as a 'hotbed of mysticism.' It was rather a place where the nuns

lived as if Christ Himself were in the midst of them. ' He was so intimately known to the persons of this community that they communed with Him as with their most dearly loved Lord and Bridegroom, as one good friend communes with another.'

There happened at that time to be in the convent several nuns whose poetic and visionary gifts were united with spiritual genius. The abbess, Gertrude of Hackeborn, was a broadminded and saintly woman of great mental and spiritual power who trained the sensitive and creative spirits under her charge with sound practical wisdom. The Cistercian houses were of course much influenced by the spirit of S. Bernard, who taught that the contemplative must bring back from his intercourse with God, food and strength for other souls. And the Dominicans, who directed this particular convent, taught the same thing ; their Order was instituted ' for preaching and the saving of souls,' while the chief object of their studies was to enable the friars ' to be of use to the souls of their neighbours.'

The Abbess Gertrude insisted on study. Books were rare, but she made her nuns copy some and bought others so that the brighter spirits among her flock might have the best available help in their study of the Scriptures. The Commentaries of S. Augustine and S. Bernard were used at Helfde. It was a cheerful place where a very fragrant spirituality was combined, in the true spirit of S. Benedict, with practical and intellectual work. Study was encouraged, the poor and sick visited, the Scriptures copied and illuminated, while singing was a feature of that community where Mechthild of Hackeborn was known as the *Nightingale of the Lord.*

This Mechthild, Gertrude's younger sister, was a

gentle, poetic soul with a gift for describing her symbolic visions, which she wrote down in the *Liber Specialis Gratiae*. Some students think she may have been Dante's Matelda; he may even have known the works of both, for Mechthild of Magdeburg's descriptions of hell and her namesake of Hackeborn's descriptions of heaven are strangely like those of the *Divina Commedia*.

There was another famous nun at Helfde, she who was afterwards known as S. Gertrude the Great, an eager student who translated Latin works into German and who was the author of the second part of the *Legatus divinae pietatis* and an ascetic treatise *Exercitia spiritualia*.[1] Her intimate and personal adoration of Christ led, through intense concentration on the self-giving of God to man, to the devotion of the Sacred Heart, first instituted by this Gertrude and her director, Mechthild of Hackeborn. These two sensitive and poetic spirits were Mechthild of Magdeburg's friends at Helfde, and although the younger Gertrude was only a child of nine when our Mechthild went there, it was no doubt owing to her and her inspiration that three of the great devotional works of that century came from the Convent of Helfde.

Mechthild went to Helfde about 1268 (three years after the birth of Dante). She was now fifty, she was penniless, and she was ill. But she was welcomed with great affection; she was well known for her writings; that she was being persecuted only made her a more fitting subject for hospitality, and the nuns of Helfde were deeply impressed by her visionary powers, 'when like an eagle she soared up to gaze into the countenance of God.'

[1] See *O Beata Trinitas*, Prayers of S. Gertrude and S. Mechthild, translated by the Rev. John Gray. London; 1927.

Not long after she went there she had a painful illness:

> Then said I to my Lord, 'What wilt Thou with this suffering?' He answered, 'All thy ways are decreed, thy footsteps counted, thy life is sanctified, thy end will be joyful, a wealth of Love lies very near thee.' 'Lord!' I replied, 'if my life be sanctified, how comes it that I can do so little good?' 'Thereby,' answered the Lord, 'is thy life sanctified, that My rod will never leave thy back!' (vii. 4.)

Mechthild had already written five parts of her book; the sixth and seventh parts she was to write at Helfde. Let us look more closely into it. Near the beginning, that is to say, when the writer had just left home as a girl of twenty-three, we come to a passage describing how the soul is pursued by a mighty following Love which will give it no rest.

This image of the pursuit of the soul by Love, 'of the spirit rushing in terror from the overpowering presence of God, but followed, sought, conquered in the end, is common,' we are told, 'to all mediaeval mystics.'[1] Modern readers are familiar with Francis Thompson's powerful use of this image in the *Hound of Heaven*. We find it also in Eckhart, who may have borrowed it from Mechthild, 'He who will escape God only runs to His bosom, for all corners are open to Him.' We find it in S. Augustine, 'Loving the beatific life I feared to seek it in its very home and fled it while still seeking. . . . But behold Thou, ever at the back of Thy runaways, the God of revenge and fountain of mercies both at the same time, who turnest us to Thyself by most wonderful means.'[2] We find it also of course in the Gospels and the Psalms.[3]

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 161.

[2] *Confessions*, vi. 11, iv. 9.

[3] This subject is fully explored by R. L. Mégroz, *Francis Thompson*, pp. 153 sqq.

In Mechthild the Soul cries out in sweet distress to her Love :

Ah ! had I never known Thee ! Thou hast hunted me, caught me, bound me, and so sorely wounded me that never more may I be healed !

Love answers :

That I hunted thee was my pleasure,
That I caught thee was my desire,
That I bound thee was my joy.
I drove Almighty God from His heaven,
I took from Him His human life,
I gave Him back with honour to His Father—
How couldst thou, miserable worm,
Hope to save thyself from me ? (i. 3.)

Driven on remorselessly by her longing, the Soul overcomes the pleasures of the world, the demands of the senses, treads pride underfoot, and comes soaring up like an eagle to her Lord.

'Thou huntest sore for thy Love,
What bringest thou me, my Queen ? '

'Lord ! I bring Thee my treasure. It is greater than the mountains, wider than the world, deeper than the sea, higher than the clouds, more glorious than the sun, more manifold than the stars ; it outweighs the whole earth ! '

'O thou ! Image of My Divinity, ennobled by My humanity, adorned by My Holy Spirit, what is thy treasure called ? '

'Lord ! it is called my Heart's Desire. I have withdrawn it from the world, denied it to myself and all creatures. Now I can bear it no further. Where, O Lord, shall I lay it ? '

'Thy Heart's Desire thou shalt lay nowhere but in Mine own Divine Heart and on My human breast. There alone wilt thou find comfort and be embraced by My Spirit ! ' (i. 39–43.)

The Soul then surmounts the need of penitence and penance, overcomes the love of the world, the temptations of the devil, the satisfactions of the flesh, the desires of her own will. Wearied at last by her efforts, she sighs for her Divine Lover.

The Senses (her waiting-maids) warn her of His approach ; He is coming through the dewy morning to the singing of birds. The Soul prepares to meet Him. She arrays herself in robes of humility and chastity and all the virtues, and fares forth into the wood (the Company of the Blessed). There nightingales sing day and night of union with God and of heavenly wisdom. There in festal dance the Soul tries to imitate the example of the Prophets, the humility of the Virgin, the virtue of Christ, the sanctity of the Saints. At last the Divine Lover comes. 'Maiden!' He says, 'Thou shalt dance as merrily as Mine Elect!' But she answers sadly :

I cannot dance, O Lord,
My love for Thee distracts me.
If Thou wouldst have me spring
So must Thou sing
And I will leap for love,
From love to knowledge
And from thence to ecstasy
Above all human sense.
There will I stay. . . .

The Soul is then wearied, she must rest. The Senses bid her cool herself in the tears of love of Mary Magdalene; she replies that is not enough; she must drink the unmixed wine. They tell her great love is found in chastity ; she replies that also is not enough. They say she may cool her ardour in martyrs' blood ; she replies she has been martyred many a day. They say many live gladly in the counsel of their confessors ; she replies such counsel is good but is of no help to her. They say great safety is to be found in the wisdom of the Apostles ; she replies, 'Wisdom I have myself, to choose the Highest.' They say the angels are bright and lovely in the Light of Love ; she answers, 'Their bliss but makes my heart sore when I cannot see their love, my Bridegroom!' They counsel her

to seek the Child in the Virgin's lap ; ' That is a childish love,' she answers, ' I am full grown ; I seek the Bridegroom ! ' ' Ah ! Lady ! ' the Senses warn her, ' comest thou there, so wert thou blinded, so fiery hot is the glory of the Godhead ! How couldest thou rest there half an hour ? ' She answers :

> The fish cannot drown in the water,
> The bird cannot sink in the air,
> Gold cannot perish
> In the refiner's fire.
> This has God given to all creatures
> To foster and seek their own nature,
> How then can I withstand mine ?
> I must to God,
> My Father through nature,
> My Brother through humanity,
> My Bridegroom through love—
> His am I forever.

And so the beloved goes in to the Lover, into the secret hiding-place of the sinless Godhead. And there, the Soul being fashioned in the very nature of God, no hindrance at all can come between it and God (i. 44).[1]

This allegory of the ascent of the soul illustrates Mechthild's favourite doctrine, one she is never tired of repeating and emphasizing, that not all the strivings and struggles and conquests of the soul can give it peace ; that can only be found in God, its Home, and the only weapons with which it can win its way to God are the death and sufferings of Christ. She constantly insists on what von Hügel calls the *givenness* of grace, and counts it a ' fathom-

[1] This allegory is described by Miss Evelyn Underhill as ' a love-story of the period adapted with extraordinary boldness to the purposes of mystical experience.' See *Essentials of Mysticism*, pp. 80 sqq., where the reader will find translations of some of Mechthild's poetry into English verse with an expert exposition of its significance.

less mystery that God can look on sinners and regard them as converted men ' (vi. 17).

Her doctrine of sin is illustrated by the story of an unhappy soul who asked her to pray for him, and who feared that God had not forgiven his sin. God answered :

> That were impossible. Whoso is sorry for sin, him do I forgive ; whoso regrets it bitterly, to him I give My blessing ; whoso grieves for sin so that he would rather die than sin again, he shall, after this life, be condemned to no more punishment for sin. (iv. 6.)[1]

She is told by our Lord that it is His task to carry the sins of the whole world on His sinless shoulders ; that before He unlocked the gates of heaven with the key of His Cross, no man could by any striving or yearning of love attain the Heights of Eternity. Adam had shut the gates so fast that no human power could open them. With a gesture of magnificent certitude in Christ she exclaims :

> Shouldest Thou then, O God,
> Drive home Thy bolts of Justice
> Locking the gates of heaven
> That sinners might not enter in—
> Then would I turn me to Jesus Thy dear Son
> Who through Thy mighty power
> Holds in His human hands
> The key of heaven.
> That key was forged
> In the land of the Jews,
> But when Jesus turns it
> The veriest outcast then
> Can enter in
> To the house of Thy love. (vi. 16.)

This conviction that nothing can satisfy the soul save union with God who enfolds it, yet dwells

[1] Here we have another parallel with Eckhart who writes ' To sin is no sin if we are sorry.'

within it, the utter givenness of that union, its possibility through Christ alone but its grand inevitability *in* Him, Mechthild repeats and insists on, as we have seen, again and again. She works it out in many allegories. In one of them she writes of the soul as a poor, ragged, little woman in a great church surrounded by all the glorious Company of Heaven. Ashamed of her rags, she was wondering whether she might stay there in them, when she suddenly became aware that she was robed in a red mantle fashioned by her love. She thought that in order to receive the Holy Eucharist she must bring good works with her. But she had none. And when the offering was made, she had nothing to offer. She was given a golden penny—her own will—and God said to her, 'If thou utterly give Me this penny that thou never ask it back again, I will redeem thee from thy cross and bring thee to Me in My kingdom. . . .'

'Then went the little woman to the altar with very great love and widely-opened soul' (ii. 4).

The little human creature, according to Mechthild, can give God nothing till she first receives it from Him. Writing to a friend on this subject she said:

> Great is the overflow of Divine Love which never stands still but ever ceaselessly and tirelessly pours forth, so that our little vessel is filled to the brim and overflows. If we do not choke the channel with self-will, it continues to flow and overflow. Lord! Thou art great but we are small, alas! How then shall we become like Thee? Our vessel which Thou hast filled is truly small, but a small vessel can be emptied into a large one till it too becomes full. The large vessel is the Plenitude of Grace; we alas! are so small that even a little word of God or of Holy Scripture so utterly fills us that we can contain no more. Then we empty out this gift into the large vessel which is God. How can we do this? We must pour out what we have received with holy desire on sinners, that they may be cleansed and the little vessel will thereby be filled again. . . .

Thus spake the Lord, 'Give me all that is thine and I will give thee all that is Mine.' He suffered much for us, even unto death. But a little pain of ours seems to us very great. . . . He thy Love died for Love for thy sake ; now love Him so that thou mayst long to die for His sake. . . . The thoughts of God and of the soul that loves Him mingle together as air is transfused by sunlight ![1] In that sweet union the sun melts the frost and darkness, we know not how. It is just in that way that our blessedness comes to us, through the love and joy of God. (vii. 55.)

Love flows from God to man, penetrating his body and soul. It flows without effort, as a bird glides on the air without moving its wings.

She tells us how the soul must prepare itself for God :

If a bird remains long on the ground without flying, his wings become weak, his feathers heavy with dust. But if he stands up and flaps his wings till they catch the air, he glides into flight. The longer he flies, the more joyfully he soars, the more exhilarated he becomes ; he no longer touches the earth, so utterly have the wings of love borne him from desire for earthly things. In the same way ought we to prepare ourselves when our spirits wish to soar aloft. We must raise the wings of longing up to God, we must exercise our virtues and good works through love : if we persevere we will at last attain to the very heart of God. (vii. 61.)

Attractive as she is in this simple and intimate way, Mechthild has also what might be called a grand manner when ' a light of utmost splendour glows upon the eyes of her mind. She sees the unmingled joy and living life of Eternity and conceives of the Blessed Trinity as a sacred music in which the Godhead strikes the note, Humanity sings, and the Holy Spirit is the harpist, to which the whole chorus of the elect, whose minds are

[1] Ruysbroeck, writing a century later, has strange similarity with Mechthild's thought. In him we read of the saints, ' Their bare understanding is drenched through by the Eternal Brightness even as the air is drenched through by sunshine ' (*Book of Supreme Truth*, chap. xi).

stretched out in love, harmonizes with celestial sound.' [1] She too, like Dante, had a vision of a mountain, but hers is not the Mount of Purgatory but the height of Divine Majesty; it rests on a shining cloud, its summit is radiant like the sun, but the human eye cannot bear to look on it without long and arduous purification (ii. 21).

> Our God is a consuming fire, ineffably tending upwards above all creatures, endlessly, sweetly, everlastingly burning. . . . The dying sparks of this most ardent fire are the shining brightnesses of celestial spirits. Its rays are the godlike splendours of all the saints, with which, while on earth, they wondrously purified the Church. The living coals of this fire are the Just, who still burn with Divine Love and glow upon their neighbours. . . . The ashes of this fire are the bodies of the saints who have passed out of this world, who yet sleep in the dust, expecting that blessed hope and coming of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ. (vi. 29.)

Though Mechthild's conceptions of heaven and hell are naturally those of her age, they have characteristic and original features. In her vision of hell, for instance, she sees a place whose name is Eternal Hatred, a place of which Lucifer is the foundation stone. The deadly sins are grouped closely round him, next to them come the lukewarm Christians, then the Jews, and furthest away from the fiery deeps, the heathen.

Her Paradise was a place of trees and grass. There were apples on the trees and sweet-smelling foliage. Clear streams flowed swiftly through it, warm breezes blew softly. The air was mild beyond expression but there were no animals or birds, for God had reserved it for man alone. This would be for many of us a lonely Paradise and surely a strange one for Mechthild too; perhaps she altered her views, for later in life her *Flowing Light* said to her: 'Whosoever knows and loves

[1] Gardner, *Dante and the Mystics*, p. 274.

the nobleness of My freedom, cannot bear to love Me alone in Myself; he must love Me in the creatures—though I remain ever nearest his soul' (vi. 4). However generally we interpret this saying, it can hardly be reconciled with a Paradise reserved for man alone.

The kind of message Mechthild brought back from her visions is instructive; so too is the kind of life she lived and advised others to live. She was very humble and she advised all in authority to be the same. In a long letter of advice addressed to the Superior of a convent, she urges him (or her) to speak to those under his charge in this way:

> I, unworthy of all good,
> Am thy servant in all things
> And not thy master.
> Yet have I, alas! power over thee.
> I send thee out in the same name
> As Jesus Christ went out from His Father
> When He sought the lost sheep
> So long that He died for love.

The next passage (about how to behave in the guest-house, infirmary, and kitchen) shows us Mechthild's own religion as a generous and selfless thing in which there was room for laughter and enjoyment of the material gifts of God, room in fact for everything except gloominess and thoughts of self.

> Thou shalt go daily to the Guest-house
> And act according to the loving-kindness of God.
> Yea! thou thyself must wash the feet
> Of thy brethren.
> Then art thou most truly the Superior
> When serving in humility.
> Thou shalt go every day to the sick-house,
> And heal the sick with lovely news of God,
> And cheer them gently too with earthly joys,
> For God is very rich.

It is good to cherish cleanliness in the sick,
To be merry and laugh with them
In a godly manner,
To serve them eagerly and ask them lovingly
Of their illnesses and pains.
If thou thus stand by them
Then will the love of God flow sweetly into thine own soul.
Thou shalt go daily to the kitchen
To be sure that the needful provision is good
That neither thy meanness nor the cook's laziness
May rob the Lord of sweet music in the choir,
For no hungry priest may sing sweetly
Nor study deeply,
And thus might our Lord lack that service
Which is His due. (vi. 1.)

She was sound as to the necessity of setting apart some time in every day in which the soul could stay quietly in God's presence. Her letter of advice to a Superior dwells on that too:

Be sure that during the day or the night you find an hour to talk with our dear Lord, praying to Him without interruption. For the heavenly gift God loves to give His children is a fine and lofty one. It comes freely to the soul that draws near to Him, to whom He bends down in His unmeasured love. He loved us so much that He gave up all things for us for thirty years. . . . Could you be so discourteous as to refuse Him one hour a day? (vi. 1.)

In another place she writes:

Prayer is naught else but a yearning of soul . . . when it is practised with the whole heart, it has great power. It makes a sour heart sweet, a sad heart merry, a poor heart rich, a foolish heart wise, a timid heart courageous, a sick heart well, a blind heart full of vision, a cold heart ardent. For it draws down the great God into the little heart; it drives the hungry soul up into the plenitude of God; it brings together these two lovers, God and the soul, in a wondrous place where they speak much of love. (v. 13.)

After Mechthild had completed the sixth part of her book at Helfde, she thought her work was done. But she was shown that she still had more to say,

and the seventh part, seeing that she had now become blind and helpless, she dictated to the sisters. She asked God how she was to bear these latter days of weakness and blindness. 'Do in thy last days as in thy first,' was the answer she received. 'Love and longing, fear and repentance, these were the beginning of thy life, they must also be the end. . . . Faith becometh knowledge, longing becometh full assurance' (vi. 6). Thus strengthened she lived valiantly on.

'When I think of death,' she wrote, 'my soul rejoices so greatly in the thought of going forth from this earthly life, that I am wrapped in a sweet and supernatural peace beyond words, and my spirit is aware of the marvels that attend the passing hence of the soul. . . . That I dare to say I love God is a gift of His grace. For when my sins and sufferings are before me, then does my soul burn with love of God; the sweetness of it is so exceeding that even my poor body shares this blessedness.' (vi. 26.)

But for all her brave acceptance of what came to her, Mechthild had a very full share of suffering, from persecution and from illness as well as from that inevitable desolation which is the lot of all great lovers of God. She tells us why this must be so.

The gift which is written in this book
Was given me in three ways.
At first most delicately,
Then in greatest intimacy,
Now with much suffering. . . .

The nature of love is such that it overflows at first in sweetness, secondly it becomes rich in understanding, thirdly it abounds in desolation. . . . No man carries heaven in his heart save he who has detached himself from all comfort and all favour in this poor world. For should earthly happiness separate us from God, then we must needs make our way back to Him through suffering. He cannot spare us that, and we, on our part, would not be without it. For in our strivings and sufferings, He gives us His peace. (vi. 20.)

She tells us how this happened in herself, how when she knelt down at the hour of prayer, God would not give her the slightest touch of His grace. She thought of her human frailties; she feared they were the hindrance to her spiritual communion. 'Ah! no!' said her soul; 'think rather of the *faithfulness* of God and praise Him for it! *Gloria in excelsis Deo!*' (ii. 7). It must have been with such thoughts in her mind that she wrote the well-known passage:

Ah! Lord! seeing Thou hast taken from me all that I had of Thee, give me by grace the same gift Thou givest every dog by nature, that I may be true to Thee, my Master, in my need, when deprived of all consolation! This I desire more even than Thy heavenly kingdom. (ii. 25.)

In tune with this heroic and selfless constancy is another passage:

It were more bitter to me than death to do that which is good without God. . . . His great love does not flow in tears but burns in the fire of heavenly glory. It spreads to far distances and yet remains steadfast in itself. It rises up into union with God and remains in humility in itself. It grasps the greatest and retains the least. . . . O Love! who are they who know Thee? They are those through whom the Light of God gleams and burns. They do not live in themselves. The more they are tried, the stronger they grow. . . . The greater the love, the greater the holy fear, the fuller the comfort, the greater the dread of sin. The loving soul does not fear with terror, it fears nobly.

As she grew gradually weaker she longed to be allowed to die. But she was told she should grow richer yet through suffering, she should find in pain 'the grave but kindly teacher of immortal secrets.' The last paragraph in her book is a parable of how God decks the soul with suffering.

When the virgins are clothed according to the will of the Bridegroom, they require no other wedding-garments; that is to say, they are rich in suffering, illness, sorrow, temptation,

many kinds of pain . . . these are the wedding garments of the loving soul. . . .

But the workaday clothes are fasting, watching, discipline, penance, sighing, weeping, prayer, fear of sin; hard, straining, difficult work, the eager effort of mind and body in God and for God, a lively hope and an ordered love, a heart directed in all things to the will of God—such are the workaday clothes of a good man. When we are ill we are clad in wedding garments, but when we are well we wear our working clothes.

Mechthild herself, a poor, blind, helpless, suffering beggar woman, was richly clad in such garments. This is how she gave thanks for them:

Lord! I thank Thee that in Thy love Thou hast taken from me all earthly riches, that Thou now clothest me and feedest me through the kindness of others. . . .

Lord! I thank Thee that since Thou hast taken from me the sight of my eyes, Thou servest me now with the eyes of others.

Lord! I thank Thee that since Thou hast taken away the power of my hands and my heart, Thou servest me by the hands and hearts of others. Lord, I pray for them. Reward them for it in Thy heavenly love, that they may faithfully serve and please Thee till they reach a happy end. (vii. 64.)

She had once, in reflecting on the everlasting spring of the Godhead from which she and all things came forth, asked in how far the soul was divine. She was answered, 'The loving soul has an eye. God has put vision in it. With that eye the soul sees how God has fashioned it. He so enfolds it in Himself and penetrates it with His divine nature, that it can say nothing save that He, in closest union with it, is more than a Father' (vi. 31). It was for this relationship, that of a little child in the arms of its father, that she prayed at the end.

Regarding her as a saint, the nuns used to ask her for advice. 'You ask teaching from me,' she protested, 'but I am unlearned. What you require you will find a thousandfold in your books.'

But she was at last prevailed upon to tell them her practice of preparation for the Eucharist.

When I, a poor sinner, go to receive the Body of our Lord, I examine the appearance of my soul in the mirror of my sins. There I see truly how I have lived, how I am living, and how I am going to live. In this mirror I see nothing but alas ! and alas ! Then I cast my eyes on the ground and lament and weep if I can, for the Eternal, Incomprehensible God is so good that He will even bend down to enter the muddy pool of my heart. (vii. 21.)

This constant marvelling at the overwhelming goodness of God is very characteristic of Mechthild's outlook, the outlook of the saints. As a young woman she had been troubled in thinking of her end, but in her last days that fear was removed from her.

'God has given me peace,' she tells us. 'I said to Him, "Lord ! gladly do I think of the light and blessedness of Thy heavenly glory of which I am so unworthy, but I still have a great dread as to the manner in which my soul shall pass from my body ? " And the Lord said, " It shall be thus. I draw My breath and the soul will follow on to Me as the needle to the magnet." ' (v. 32.)

This conviction, that the soul at death passes easily to that Home towards which it has toiled and travelled and which the Divine Lover by His sacrifice and death has won for it, she expresses elsewhere with her unfailing richness of imagery, in a metaphor which we may well use as her own epitaph.

After she had been twelve years at Helfde 'the rippling tide of love, which all her life had flowed secretly from God into her soul, drew it mightily back into its Source.'

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THE BLESSED ANGELA OF FOLIGNO
1248–1309

WHILE we shall find in each of these studies that none of the creative personalities we read of stood alone, but that each one owed much of her particular tendency to her particular environment, this is especially true of the Blessed Angela. Though her real life developed late, after a youth which promised no such flowering, yet she was born in Foligno only twenty-four years after the death of S. Francis.

That whole countryside breathed the Franciscan spirit ; many who had known S. Francis were still living, and Jacopone, the poet of the movement and leader of the Spiritual party, lived at Todi, not many miles away.[1] And in these early years after the death of Francis, his ideal not only fired the minds of hundreds who left the world to follow it, but inspired hundreds more who could not for various reasons make the great renunciation, to enrol themselves as members of the Third or Lay Order. Such Tertiaries lived in the world according to a simple rule ; they frequently met together, they had singing guilds at which they sang the *Laude* of Jacopone, and in this and in other ways they kept the characteristic Franciscan ideal alive with its insistence on the joy of religion. ' It is

[1] It may help us to reconstruct her cultural background to remember that Dante, though seventeen years younger than Angela, was living in Florence at the time we first meet her.

ALINARI

BLESSED ANGELA OF FOLIGNO
After the Fresco by Pierantonio Mezzastris,
Church of S. Anne, Foligno.

not fitting,' S. Francis had said, 'when one is in God's service to have a gloomy face ; always show a face shining with holy joy !' The joy he meant, however, was that of effort and self-conquest, not of idle or selfish satisfactions.

And yet when we first meet Angela, this ideal does not seem to have infected her. She is encouraging for us as showing out of what unlikely material real sanctity can be produced. We know really nothing about her youth. It is in the year 1285 that, as a married woman of thirty-seven, we first hear of her. She is described as 'a typical Folignian with a face like a full-moon.' She was of good birth, good education and intelligence. She was evidently in comfortable circumstances, living with her mother, her husband, and her sons. She was of an undisciplined and worldly nature. She lived the petty social life of her little provincial town, liking to cut a fine figure in it, to be well dressed and talked about for that reason. She was lively and impulsive and had an aptitude for sarcastic repartee. She 'coloured and braided' her hair ; she wore shoes 'adorned with cut leather' ; she even washed her face frequently, a practice which, though it does not dismay us now, was unusual for her time. She discharged the religious duties expected of a good Catholic, more because it was the thing to do and she had always done it, than because it meant anything to her.

This all sounds drab and ordinary enough, but suddenly we come to something more distressing—this worldly little lady 'studied that she might obtain the fame of sanctity' ! (19).[1] The Franciscan movement was at its height, it was fashionable

[1] Such page references are made, for the convenience of the English reader, to the English translation of Angela's book, *The Divine Consolation of the Blessed Angela of Foligno.*

to be devout and she wished to be thought so. She may even then have been a member of the Third Order, because it would look so well to belong to it.

It is from herself that we learn all this. She confesses it bravely and frankly, and tells us further how she used to do good deeds that she might obtain honour among men ; how she boasted to those guests who were enjoying the good things of her table that she herself ate neither flesh nor meat—while all the time she was not merely hungry but ' full of greediness and gluttony ' ; how she made an outward show of austerity but at night ' had many sheets and coverings where she lay down to sleep, causing them to be taken away in the morning that none might see them ' (19). Poor foolish little lady ! It has been truly said that ' no flower of holiness ever blossomed from more unpromising soil.' But thinking of her courage in making these unpleasant disclosures, which of us will dare to cast the first stone ?

It was about 1285, that as a woman of thirty-seven, something aroused her. We do not know what it was. Thinking over the period, we remember that the saintly John of La Verna preached through Umbria and Tuscany about that time, ' gaining much fruit of souls ' ; also that Conrad of Offida, that ' wondrous zealot of gospel poverty,' was her contemporary, and that he too was a famous preacher, ' poor in spirit but rich in holiness of life.' It is almost certain that they met Angela later on after she had become one of the chief powers of the Spiritual party, and they may have influenced her now. But whatever it may have been that aroused her, she suddenly became filled with horror at the thought of her make-believes and pretences. It was not—at least not con-

sciously—love of God that forced her to alter her way of life, but fear of what might happen to her if she did not alter it.

It is fortunate for us that about three years ago a well-known Franciscan scholar, the Abbé Ferré, went to study the manuscript of Angela's works in the *Biblioteca* at Assisi. A little yellowed parchment book was put into his hands inscribed in writing rusty with age, *Liber sororis Lellae de Fulgineo de Tertio Ordine Sancti Francisci*. Although the existence of this manuscript was known to earlier scholars it appears that none of them had ever studied it, and the Abbé Ferré found that what had for seven hundred years been regarded as the complete works of the Blessed Angela was in fact nothing but a doctrinal extract. This is unfortunately all that we at present possess in English, but the Abbé Ferré has now brought out a critical edition of the complete works, the Latin text with a French translation.[1] They reveal to us not only the doctrine but the life of the Blessed Angela, the various stages through which she passed, and we find there in 'Sister Lella'[2] a much more living personality than the somewhat remote Angela of the previously published writings.

In 1285, then, following an awakening of which we do not know the cause, Angela began to reflect on her deceitful life, and she grew frightened. What would happen to her if she went on like this and did not repent? She says she had committed 'grave faults'; that may only have been because the sense of sin was sharply afflicting the newly awakened penitent; we are the more inclined to think so from her accusing herself so bitterly of such 'sins'

[1] *Le livre de l'expérience des vrais fidèles*, par Sainte Angèle de Foligno, édité par M. J. Ferré.

[2] *Lella* being a diminutive of Angela.

as braiding her hair and wearing ornamental shoes. But she was fond of the world and society and there may have been something more serious. Local tradition says that there was. For when she went to confession and found herself before the priest she was so ashamed of her sins, that she could not bring herself to confess them. She communicated, nevertheless, thus adding the sin of sacrilege to the rest. After that her conscience reproached her day and night and she could get no rest. She appealed in despair to S. Francis to send her a confessor to whom she could really unburden herself. That very night he appeared to her in a dream [1] and said, ' Sister ! hadst thou asked me sooner, I should have answered sooner. But now, what thou asked of me is granted.'

Next morning she got up very early and went to Mass at San Francesco. But passing the Cathedral on the way home, she felt impelled to go in. A Franciscan friar was preaching, Fra Arnaldo. He was the bishop's chaplain and he was well known to Angela for he was a relation, probably an uncle. Now, however, she recognized in him the confessor divinely appointed for her and she made him a full confession of all her sins, ' albeit in this confession I did feel no love but only bitterness, shame, and pain ' (2). The point is, however, that she had felt compelled to make it. Her training had commenced, training in the disciplined, selfless way of the spiritual life.

Thinking of the thirty hidden years of the life of Christ, she set herself a pattern of thirty spiritual

[1] Angela was a good dreamer, and many of her visions came to her in that way. It is well here to remember the difference between ephemeral, surface dreams and those vivid dream experiences which seem really to answer thought and by their conviction prove a real influence and strength.

steps to climb. 'As I walked by the way of penitence,' she tells us, 'I did take eighteen spiritual steps before I came to know the imperfection of my life' (1). Each step higher was to give her a wider view out over the dusty plain of her imperfections.

She began this ascent as an ordinary comfort-loving, easy-going married woman. After the six years it took her to climb the first eighteen steps, we find her a widow, vowed to poverty of the most absolute kind, poverty not merely in material things, but detachment from creatures, detachment even from those spiritual joys the uninitiated might consider reasonable or even necessary. But see what Angela had come to think about them!

Taking Christ as her Pattern, she reflects how the companions God gave Him during the whole of His life on earth, in order to furnish an ensample to us, were 'perfect, complete, and continual poverty; perfect, complete, and continual contempt; and thirdly, the utmost suffering' (54). Christ, she goes on, desired to be poor in all temporal things, in kindred and even friendship. He put away from Him His own nature, making Himself poor and needy, voluntarily offering Himself up to suffering and death.

> He who was the chief of all saints and king of all virtues, in whom was united all goodness, did this thing. . . . Alas! how great is our folly! The mighty Lord and King of kings was despised and rejected of men, but we do seek ever to be exalted and preferred and to live in liberty, free from all yoke whatsoever! (62.)

This seems to show that although we found Angela a weak and futile little lady, her capacity had only been latent. Now her heroism was aroused. She was prepared to do anything which would help her to escape from her old sinful life

and bring her nearer Perfection. She had to cope with an unstable, romantic temperament ; at one moment she was swept up to heights of exaltation, the next plunged in depths of darkness. She had to school herself to disregard these sudden upliftings and downcastings, to 'bear evenly what was uneven.' Yet she was far from being a neurotic. 'Judgement, lucidity, cohesion of ideas, force of will, Angela has all these, and they demand our confidence in her.' [1]

In these early years she was much occupied with her own sins, her own despairs, her own strivings ; such self-occupation was inevitable. But her eager submission to discipline gradually achieved its end. She came to understand that feelings did not matter, that what *did* matter was love and trust in God in fair as in foul weather. No great lover of God ever attained the heights easily ; Angela had many swamps and jungles to pass through before she could even commence the ascent ; she often slipped and fell, but she got up again and struggled on. In her final visions of God we see to what heights of peace and tranquil certitude she attained.

At the outset, then, though feeling no joy or comfort in religion, she faithfully performed the penances imposed on her, 'welcoming the divine mercy that had opened her eyes.' Her only consolation at this time was that she was sorry—'but it was a bitter consolation!' She came gradually to realize that in her sins she had not only offended the Creator but likewise all creatures, that her sin did not matter only to herself but affected the whole organism of which she was a part. This idea of the interconnection of souls seems in Angela the germ of a doctrine restated in

[1] Ferré, *Spiritualité de Ste Angèle*, p. 55.

our own day, that the strivings and activities of even the most obscure and humble soul are not merely a private matter but affect the whole society of souls,[1] that one soul can 'not only pray but suffer for another.'[2] We shall find this idea further developed in Elisabeth Leseur.[3]

In Angela's seventh step she began to meditate on the Cross. The idea of redemptive suffering began to come home to her; she realized clearly for the first time that Christ had died for *her* sins, that 'she herself had helped to crucify her Lord.' Day and night she was haunted by a vision of Christ, wounded and bleeding. 'I have suffered all this for thee,' He said to her; 'what canst thou do that will suffice thee?' The intensity with which she realized all this was partly due to her spiritual background. The Franciscans were deeply given to meditation on the Passion, closely brought home to them by the Stigmata of their seraphic Father; they regarded the Stigmata as proof that S. Francis was in very truth the reincarnation of Christ. The vision of Pier Pettignano, the Comb-seller of Siena, shows us how literally the first Franciscans really did believe this. In his vision, Pier saw Christ, followed by the Blessed Virgin and the whole company of heaven, walking slowly along, carefully examining the ground as they went, that they might find the very footsteps of Christ. And it was the feet of Francis, the little ragged, barefooted friar, which found and fitted the very footprints of his Master. Angela was perhaps thinking of this vision when she said to her disciples, 'Set your feet verily in this way!'

To the Franciscans, therefore, the true joy of

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Man and the Supernatural*, p. 258.
[2] Von Hügel, *Selected Letters*, p. 269. [3] See p. 303.

religion lay in the privilege of sharing the Cross. Angela herself felt that all her strength came to her through the Cross; she meditated constantly on the Passion and asked that she might feel its pains in her own body. 'To learn how greatly he is loved by the All-Powerful God and how unworthy he is of that love, the child of God must run to the Cross,' she tells us. 'He must place himself before it and contemplate it. There he will find and recognize love.' And here the Divine Voice taught Angela in parable:

> Let us suppose a father whose sons had sinned. And the father, innocent of the crime of his sons, was put to death because of it. [Angela was shown the cross-roads where this man was put to death and where his blood mingled with the dust of the highway.] The sons naturally suffered because of the death of their father, because his cruel death had been accepted as reparation for their sin. And they always carried this great sorrow in their hearts. It was so great that they could not bear to pass the place where he was put to death for them. If they were obliged to pass that way their hearts were wrung afresh every time as if their father had but that moment suffered death for them.
>
> 'O soul!' said the Master, 'confess to thyself that thou shouldst feel a sorrow even greater for the death of Christ, for He is to thee more than a father and He died for thy sins. Suffer, O soul, who must pass by the Cross on which Christ died! Halt beside it, for it is thy salvation and thy rest; it must also be thy love, since it is through it that God has saved thee. It is an amazing thing that man can pass it by hastily, without halting. For if he were to halt there, he would find the Blood of Christ still warm.' [1]

Meditating thus, Angela tells us what happened to herself:

> In this beholding of the Cross I did so burn with the fire of love and remorse, that standing before it I did divest myself of everything and thus offer myself to Him. . . . I did greatly

[1] Ferré, *Oeuvres de Ste Angèle*, p. 103.

fear to promise . . . upon the other hand the aforesaid fire compelled me and I had no power to resist. . . . There was given to me the desire to seek out and know the way of the Cross that I might stand at its foot and find refuge there. . . . Unto that end I was enlightened and instructed after this manner; that if I did desire to find the way and come unto the Cross, I must first pardon all those who had offended me and must then put away all earthly things, not only out of mine affections but likewise in very deed, and all men and women, friends and kindred and every other thing, but more especially my possessions must I put away, even mine own self. And I must give my heart to Christ, electing to walk upon the thorny path which is the path of tribulation (5.)

Without hesitation she stepped out on this thorny path; she put off her fine clothes, ceased to be fastidious about her food, and tried to cultivate patience when any offence was done to her. She was obsessed with the idea that she must detach herself from every human tie, an idea the Middle Ages took literally from the words of Christ, *He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.* And so when her husband, her mother, and her sons all died within a short time of each other—possibly during one of the many outbreaks of plague which swept over Umbria about that date—Angela gave thanks that these obstacles of inordinate affection were thus removed by the hand of God.

This remark of hers has given much trouble to her biographers, for her attitude has been studiously misrepresented and even regarded as such a blemish on her character, that she has been dismissed as unworthy of further study. But even a slight knowledge of her book would show such critics Angela's reason for thus expressing herself. She had what Mme de Chantal called a 'terribly human heart'; she feared inordinate attachment 'as she feared the devil,' just because she knew

she was fatally inclined to it, and she had a very literal way of interpreting Scripture.

> 'There is nothing in the world,' she said later, 'which I fear as greatly as I fear love. For love penetrateth the soul more than any other thing, neither is there anything which doth so fill the mind and the whole heart as does love; so that if the soul hath not the arm wherewith to protect itself, it may easily fall into evil and suffer great ruin.' (118.)

Her conviction was that she must forsake all affection 'contrary to the will of the Beloved' and strive to make herself like unto Christ. He had forsaken everything for our sake, 'His kindred, His Mother . . . therefore ought we also to do all these things for His sake; otherwise love goeth halting upon our side' (139). And so when the affection she feared was removed from her, she felt that her aloneness in the world set her free to follow a vocation gradually becoming clear. We see a deliberate choice of the divine call before human considerations in Mme de Chantal and in Marie de l'Incarnation, to mention only two of the saints. And when Christ set His face towards Jerusalem, He was not unaware of the suffering such action must cause His Mother and His friends. Suffering is not the greatest of human ills, as Angela will show us, nor is the happiness of the creature the chief end of life. While Angela admits that the deaths of her mother and her sons gave her the freedom of being detached from every human bond and thrown utterly into the arms of God, she allows that these sorrows were among the greatest she had to bear in her whole life.

She now began to ask God 'what thing she could do that would be most acceptable to Him,' and she was led at first to severe penance. She was not physically courageous and she shrank from it but believed it to be necessary. 'I did *oblige* myself

to do this,' she tells us. But soon it seemed to her as it had seemed to S. Francis, that she could not sufficiently do penance while still possessed of earthly things.

> . . . wherefore in order the more freely to do this and to come unto the Cross as I had been inspired to do, I did determine most certainly to forsake everything. (7.)

Now there is a very general and widespread misconception as to Franciscan poverty. S. Francis did not regard poverty as a good in itself but as a means to set the soul free from material things. He described poverty as ' that celestial virtue whereby all earthly things and fleeting are trodden underfoot and whereby all hindrances are lifted from the soul so that freely she may join herself to God eternal.' For Angela too it was a means. ' I know,' she says, ' that poverty is the mother of all virtues and the revelation of divine wisdom ' (36).

But though the ideal appealed to her, she shrank at first from the practice of it. She was still a young woman ; begging for alms might bring her into unpleasant situations, even into danger ; she might be cold and hungry ; she might even die. And her friends held up their hands in horror at the thought of their dainty and comfort-loving Lella giving up her good house and pretty clothes to become a beggar ! She evidently weighed the matter for some time, inwardly drawn to make the great renunciation, outwardly held by her love of comfort and security.

> ' But at last,' she says, ' divine mercy did send a certain great illumination into my heart, wherefore I did derive a certain assurance the which, as I believed then and do believe now, I shall not lose even in eternity. . . . So then I did resolve in good earnest ! ' (7.)

In another place we come to a more spirited acquiescence : ' If I must die of cold or nakedness or shame,' she declares gaily, ' so be it ! It is with joy that I will die for God ! ' [1] Even the Franciscans begged her to desist, but no warning or advice could restrain her from selling her most valuable property and distributing the price of it among the poor. And as she gradually stripped herself of her possessions, she began gradually to feel some joy in religion. All her sacrifices and penances she had made at first ' in sorrow and fear ' ; then from a longing to do something for Christ ; now at last joy began to look in on her. Poverty was for Angela, too, a ' sacrament of liberation.' [2]

In these six years she had gradually stripped off her selfhood ; she was at last freed from the most hampering bonds. She had now such delight in prayer that she would forget to eat, but she perceived it to be a snare to neglect taking sufficient food, though she says she never wearied of being on her knees or doing penance. From having ' some understanding ' she came to be filled ' with a yet greater fire and fervour of divine love.' Many visions, illuminations, and ecstasies were now granted her ; but in order that she might not be ' puffed up with the delight thereof,' she was afflicted with temptation and weakness in her overtired body.

> Always was I weak and feeble and full of pain so that I was compelled to be almost constantly lying down . . . the sufferings of the body were great, but those of the soul were beyond all comparison more bitter and more numerous. . . . Every vice was reawakened within me. . . . And when I was in that darkness of spirit, methought I would have chosen rather to be roasted than to endure such pains. (16.)

[1] Ferré, *Oeuvres de Sainte Angèle*, p. 13.
[2] Evelyn Underhill, *Jacopone da Todi*, p. 165.

She was so full of sorrow for her sins that she conceived the extravagance of going through the market-place with a rope round her neck, making open confession, declaring how in the beginning she had ' studied how she might obtain the fame of sanctity ' (21). By this time she was already regarded as a spiritual force and had evidently attracted a band of disciples round her. These she now warned in an extreme of what she afterwards called ' false humility,' that they must no longer put any faith in her, that she was ' possessed of a devil.' She was ' tortured with pride,' wondering why God should thus afflict her, what she had really done to deserve it.

> But . . . I do perceive that in betwixt that evil humility and that pride there is a great purging and purifying of the soul by which and through which is acquired that true humility without which none can be saved. . . . The poorer the soul is made, and the more profoundly humiliated, the more doth it abase and purify itself in order that it may be cleansed. And in no other way can a soul be cleansed save by deep humiliation and by being most profoundly implanted and rooted in veritable and true humility. (23.)

Though it is impossible to divide Angela's spiritual growth into water-tight divisions, it is true in a general sense to say that she was now entering on the second stage, what mystical writers call Illumination. Her extreme desolation was as the darkness before the dawn ; the last struggles of self against the gradual but steady transference of the centre of interest from self to God. And this second stage was ushered in by the well-known vision in which the Holy Spirit came to her and walked with her as she went in pilgrimage from Spello to Assisi.

She was now practically divested of possessions, of relations, of human affection, for of her com-

panion Paschalina, who lived with her, she says at this time, 'She did only weary me' (156). And Angela's realization of the glory of Divine Perfection and of her own inadequacy over against it, had robbed her even of her self-respect. So that her poverty seems to have been fairly complete.

Yet with nothing but the desire, she never dreamt of turning back. Such is the claimfulness as well as the grandeur of true religion. 'Christianity,' said Baron von Hügel,' is essentially, centrally, a heroism. . . . There is nothing like straight paying for one's religion to endear it to one.' [1] Angela's religion had cost her everything she had. What had she got in return? She often felt she was deserted by God; she could bring no conscious reality into her desire to find Him,though the desire somehow did persist. She felt she had done all she could. 'Lord! that which I do, I do only that I may find Thee!' she had protested in giving away her possessions; 'wherefore having done it, do Thou grant me the grace that I may find Thee!' And protesting thus that she desired not the gifts but the Giver, she was answered one day, 'Strive diligently and make thyself ready, for when thou hast accomplished that which thou art now doing, the whole Trinity will descend unto thee' (158).

She had already been to Rome to ask S. Peter's help in obtaining for her the grace of poverty of spirit, and now (1291) she set out for Assisi to ask S. Francis to obtain this grace for her through Jesus Christ:

'I had not yet finished giving all things unto the poor,' she says. 'As I went I did ask the blessed Francis that he would implore God for me that I might serve his Order well . . .

[1] Von Hügel, *Selected Letters*, pp. 328, 350.

that he would obtain the grace for me that I might feel somewhat of Christ. . . .

'Now when I was come to that place which lieth between Spello and the narrow road which leadeth upward unto Assisi . . . it was said unto me, "Thou hast prayed unto My servant Francis and I have not willed to send thee another messenger. I am the Holy Spirit who am come to thee to bring thee such consolation as thou hast never before tasted. And I will go with thee even unto S. Francis. I shall be within thee. . . . I will bear thee company and will speak with thee all the way; I will make no end to My speaking and thou wilt not be able to attend to any save unto Me, for I have bound thee and will not depart from thee until thou comest for the second time unto S. Francis. Then will I depart from thee in so far as this present consolation is concerned but in no other manner will I ever leave thee, and thou shalt love Me. . . . My beloved daughter, do thou love Me, for I do greatly love thee and much more than thou lovest Me."' (160.)

Angela began to wonder if she could have heard aright.

I did count over my sins and consider my faults, how that I was not worthy of so great a love. . . . 'If Thou wert truly the Holy Spirit,' she said, 'Thou wouldst not speak thus unto me, for it is neither right nor seemly seeing that I am weak and frail and might grow vainglorious thereat!' He answered me, 'Reflect and see if thou couldst be vainglorious, . . . see if thou couldst not perceive the folly of thy words by thinking of other things.' So then did I endeavour to grow vainglorious . . . and I began to gaze at the vineyards that I might learn the folly of my words. And wheresoever I looked He said unto me, 'Behold and see this is My creation!' and thereat did I feel the most ineffable sweetness. In the meantime I had remembered all my sins . . . so that I did feel greater humility than I had ever felt before. Then did He tell me that I was beloved, that the Son of God and of the Virgin Mary had inclined Himself unto me and was come to speak unto me. Wherefore Christ said unto me, 'If all the world came now unto thee, thou couldst not speak with others; for when I come unto thee, there cometh more than all the world. . . . Ask mercy for thyself and thy companions, for I am much more ready to give than thou art to receive.' Then did my soul cry aloud, saying, 'I will not ask for I am

unworthy. . . . If Thou wert verily within me, then my joy would be so great that I could not bear it and live!' Then did He make answer . . . 'I will give thee this sign that thou mayest know who I am. Go now and endeavour to speak with thy companions . . . and thou wilt see that thou canst think of naught else save of God. For I am He who alone can bind the thoughts. And all these things do I unto thee not because of thy merits but of My goodness.'

At each word did I receive great sweetness, Angela tells us. I had no desire to reach the city or that the road should ever come to an end. I can never describe the joy and sweetness which I felt. (160 sqq.)

Arrived at Assisi, she made her first station in the church, carefully concealing from her companions the joy thrilling through her. She sat down with them to a meal, trying to appear as if nothing had happened. But when she went back to the church in the afternoon it was said to her, 'The hour is come when I must fill thee with My spirit and must leave thee. . . . Nevertheless, if thou lovest Me, I will not leave thee'—that is to say, only her consciousness of the Presence would be taken from her, the love which remained within her was of God, *was* God. As Jacopone had said, '*Thou* art the love wherewith the heart loves Thee!' But when this consciousness of the Presence was withdrawn, 'albeit with great gentleness,' she sank down in the porch of the church crying again and again, 'O Love Unknown! Why dost Thou leave me? And why? And why? And why?' Her friends flocked round her, the friars hurried up to see what the commotion was about. Only one of them, Fra Arnaldo, her confessor, held back; he was affronted that his relative should make herself thus conspicuous. He thought she was in an epileptic fit, and when she came to herself he told her sharply not to come back to Assisi till she was sure of being able to behave

decently. 'I cried out,' she confesses, 'calling for death, for it was a great sorrow to me to remain in this world and not to die!' Presently she and her friends set out homewards down the hill. She tells us about it:

> With great comfort did I go upon the way. Then said Christ unto me, 'I will give thee a sign by the which thou mayest know that I am Christ who have talked with thee. This sign is the Cross and love of God which I do place within thee and which shall be with thee for ever.' And immediately I felt the Cross and the love of God within my soul and spreading throughout my body, so that I did actually feel it corporally and feeling it my soul was dissolved in God's love. (167.)

And after she got home:

> I felt a peace which was gentle but at the same time profound and which I cannot explain. I wished to die. It was a great sorrow to me to live, because of this peace which was gentle and tranquil and profound beyond all words. So that, in order to enter fully into this peace and lest I should lose it, I longed to die to this world; to live was a sorrow more bitter than that caused by the death of my mother and my sons, greater incomparably than any sorrow I could imagine.[1]

Not long afterwards Fra Arnaldo was sent back to Foligno. His displeasure had had time to cool and he was curious to know what had really happened to Angela that day. He made her tell him and he was troubled by what he heard. Was she being misled by an evil spirit? Or was it possible that this ordinary little relative of his was blessed with profound mystical experience; that she was already far advanced in the contemplative life? He felt he must know more, and by entreaties and promises of absolute secrecy he persuaded her to dictate to him the whole story of her spiritual life.

That was how her book came to be written. Angela herself could not write, and Arnaldo recog-

[1] Ferré, *Oeuvres de Sainte Angèle*, p. 55.

nized with astonishment that what was being dictated to him betrayed deep supernatural experience. Though these regions were uncharted for him, we owe Angela's writings to his recognition of their value.

There in the church of San Francesco they sat, Angela dictating, Arnaldo writing. She was so inspired by that of which she spoke, and such a torrent of words poured through her, that he could not get it all down. He wrote in Latin; he had not only to translate what he heard but to abbreviate it and to try somehow to get down the gist of what she so eagerly poured forth. He confesses, *scripsi detruncate*; he allows that he was obliged to confine himself to essentials, but he was scrupulously anxious to get her meaning right and so he read over to her what he had written. When she heard his bald version of her rich, living experience, she was bitterly disappointed. 'But I do not recognize that!' she would protest. 'It sounds so dull as you have it! So dim! So flavourless!' But she allowed that although he had pruned her story almost out of recognition, he had at least said nothing that was not true.

He had not his troubles to seek. His fellow friars wondered at his sitting so constantly in church beside this not unattractive young widow, and he could not defend himself for he was bound to secrecy about the whole thing. He was reprimanded by his Provincial; difficulties were put in the way of his being allowed to write in the church. But he persisted and we owe the greater part of Angela's works to his pen. After his death she employed other scribes, but they were not so faithful, and the Abbé Ferré thinks we can detect the interpolations of their less scrupulous pens. When for instance we come to self-praise, we may be sure

it was neither uttered by Angela nor written down by Arnaldo.

We see from all this that we have in Angela's so-called writings only a feeble reflection of the radiance she saw. Yet those who are entitled to estimate their value do not hesitate to rank Angela's great visions of God with those of S. Teresa herself.

For the next four or five years Angela was still much occupied with her own interior growth and training. There is something very disarming about the frank way she relates all this. She has no false pride, no self-consciousness ; she mercilessly analyses her moods and feelings, tries to explain the inexplicable. She became gradually aware that this training was not for her own spiritual profit alone ; that she was being moulded and fashioned as an instrument of God, that she was to co-operate in His purposes, and that her union with Him was to be a life-giving union. 'Action!' she declared, '*that* is the mark of love!' As S. Teresa was to put it, 'The object of the spiritual marriage is work.' And so in her Third Vision we read :

> Upon a certain occasion it was told me, saying, 'I who speak with thee am the divine Power who brings unto thee divine grace. The grace is this : I desire that thou shouldst be of benefit unto all men who shall behold thee. . . .' And I, albeit my soul greatly rejoiced, said, 'I desire not this grace, for I fear that it would be hurtful unto me and make me vainglorious.' But the Lord answered, 'With this thou hast naught to do, for it concerneth thee not and thou hast only the care thereof. See that thou servest it well and renderest it again unto Him to whom it belongeth. . . .'
>
> And immediately the eyes of my soul were opened and I beheld the plenitude of God, whereby I did comprehend the whole world, both here and beyond the sea, and the abyss and all things else ; and therein did I behold naught save the divine Power in a manner assuredly indescribable, so that through excess of marvelling the soul cried with a loud voice, saying,

'This whole world is full of God!' Wherefore did I now comprehend that the world is but a small thing; I saw, moreover, that the power of God was above all things, and that the whole world was filled with it. (172.)

This great passage was written by an Angela who had emerged from her apprenticeship; whose years of training had changed her from a futile, egocentric woman into a generous and self-sacrificing Mother of Souls.

'. . . a divine change took place in my soul,' she says, 'which neither saint nor angel could describe. (186.) I possess God in such fullness that I am no longer in the state in which I used to be. I walk in such perfect peace of heart and mind that I am content in all things.'

This does not mean that her peace was continuous; her difficult temperament remained, and after all she was only human; the difference was that she had learnt quietly to accept the inevitable ups and downs, and work steadily through them. While it is true that she was gifted in rare degree with the power of apprehending the Divine, she had developed that power by her life of prayer and her disciplined detachment from things. In her great metaphysical visions she was raised to levels of consciousness which can only be described as supernatural. She experienced things which 'can neither be related by the tongue nor imagined by the heart.' Yet she does struggle to relate them, as for instance in this extract from her Sixth Vision:

Methought one time in Lent that I was exceeding parched and lacking in devotion, wherefore I prayed God that He would give me something of Himself because all goodness was dried up within me. Then were the eyes of my soul opened and I beheld Love advancing gently towards me, and I beheld the beginning but not the end . . . there seemed only a continuation and eternity thereof so that I can describe neither likeness nor colour, but immediately that this love reached me, I did behold all things more clearly with the eyes of my soul than I could do with the eyes of my body. . . .

Although it did well satisfy me it did generate within me so great a hunger that all my members were loosened and my soul fainted with longing to attain the remainder. (178.)

But the 'remainder' may not be attained in this world. When Angela was told that much love was concealed because she was not able to bear more, she protested, 'If Thou art God omnipotent, *make* Thou me able to bear it!' But she was answered:

If I were to do as thou askest, thou wouldst have here all that thou desirest and wouldst no longer hunger after Me. For this reason will I not grant thy request, for I desire that in this world thou shouldst hunger and long after Me and shouldst ever be eager to find Me. (179.)

Angela was so filled with awe by the ineffable nature of her experiences and by her own unworthiness of them, that she was often driven to wonder whether they could be real or whether they were the product of her imagination. She was no blue-water visionary, ready to accept any satisfaction as a sign that she was specially favoured by God. And so she often demanded proof; she asked for a tangible sign, something she could *see*. She was answered that such a sign might easily deceive her but that she should be given a better one.

The sign shall be this. Thou shalt be ever fervent in love, and the love and the enlightened knowledge of God shall ever be with thee and in thee. This shall be a certain sign unto thee that I am He because none save I can do this. . . . My love do I leave in thee, so that for love of Me thou wilt endure tribulations, and if any person speak or do evil unto thee, thou wilt be grateful, declaring thyself unworthy of so much mercy. Such is the love which I bare unto you all for whose sake I patiently and humbly endured all things.

Therefore, says Angela, was I very ready to pray for those who did me evil, to love them with a great love and to take compassion upon them. . . . This sign did God leave so firmly implanted in my soul, with so bright and clear a light, that methinketh I could endure any martyrdom. This sign,

moreover, leadeth continually upon the straight way of salvation, that is to say, it leadeth unto love and the desire to suffer for love of God. (198 sqq.)

She was filled with the conviction that God is love and that the greatest and most important of all His commands to His children, is to love one another. Here too we see her as a good Franciscan, for to the Franciscans, to S. Francis himself, love came before everything else. It was love of God that flamed in the hearts of the Spiritual party, that inspired the passionate and tremendous poetry of Jacopone. A few lines from one of his great spiritual songs will help us to appreciate the flaming ardour of Angela's time. Jacopone writes here, in his *Amor de caritate*, of the soul, complaining to God of the over-ardent love infused in her.

Now, a new creature, I in Christ am born,
The old man stripped away ; I am new-made ;
And mounting in me like the sun at morn,
Love breaks my heart, even as a broken blade :
Christ, First and Only Fair, from me hath shorn
My will, my wits, and all that in me stayed,
I in His arms am laid,
I cry and call,
' O Thou my All,
O let me die of Love ! '

. . . . .

Love, Love, O Love, the world's wild voices cry,
Love, Love, O Love, the clamorous echoes spread ;
Love, Love, O Love, so deep Thy treasures lie,
We hunger more, the more we taste Thy bread :
Love, Love, O Love, Thou Circling Mystery,
Who enters Thee at Love's deep heart is fed ;
Thou'rt Loom, and Cloth, and Thread :
O sweet to be
Clad all in Thee,
And ceaseless chant of love.[1]

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Jacopone da Todi: A Spiritual Biography*, with a selection of the *Laude* translated into English verse by Mrs. Theodore Beck.

Although Angela had not Jacopone's genius of expression, she too was irradiated by such ardours. In one of her visions of Christ He had said to her, 'See if there is in Me any other thing but love!' and this thought took possession of her and colours her whole book.

'The Word made flesh offers to all men the intimacy of His love. To him who loves Me, I will manifest Myself. And this love is best to be found,' Angela tells us, 'in meditation on the life of God made man in Jesus Christ, whom I call the Book of Life. Which if you read it well, without haste, you will be irradiated by the divine fire in such a way that you will be able to accept all tribulation as the greatest consolation, and nothing—neither prosperity, nor worldly praise, nor even the gifts of God—will be able to distract you.'

The love shown by God during the Passion was to her greater than all the love manifested by the life of Christ, and her joy was perfected when, in one of her visions of Christ, He said to her that the cup of the Passion was made sweet to Him through her love (242).

The reader cannot have failed to notice the dual character of Angela's experience. In the beginning and in her desolate and lonely times, she found comfort in a passionate, personal devotion to the humanity of Christ. Of her many vivid experiences of His presence, that on the walk from Spello to Assisi was the most profound and transforming. For the value of her experiences lay, not in their beauty or in the joy they brought her, but in the transformation they worked in her, making her more courageous and more adequate for the work required of her. The support and strength of such visions is easy to realize. But there was a deeper side; an utterly selfless contemplative experience in which Angela's spirit lost its selfhood and ven-

tured out on the 'stormy sea of the divine.' In her Seventh Vision we find that she herself was aware of this difference in her experiences.

There was a time, we read, when my soul was exalted to behold God with so much clearness that never before had I beheld Him so distinctly. But love did I not see here so fully; rather did I lose that which before I had and was left without love. Afterwards did I see Him darkly, and this darkness was the greatest blessing that could be imagined and no thought could conceive aught that would equal this.

Then was there given unto the soul an assured faith, a firm and certain hope, wherein I felt so sure of God that all fear left me. For by that blessing which came with the darkness I did collect my thoughts and was made so sure of God that I can never again doubt but that I do of a certainty possess Him. . . .

Here, likewise, do I see all Good; and seeing it, the soul cannot think that it will depart from it or it from the Good, or that in future it must ever leave the Good. The soul delighteth unspeakably therein, yet it beholdeth naught which can be related by the tongue or imagined by the heart. It seeth nothing, yet seeth all things, because it beholdeth this Good darkly—and the more darkly and secretly the Good is seen, the more certain is it and excellent above all things. . . .

When I behold and am in that Good, I remember nothing of the humanity of Christ, of God inasmuch as He was man, nor of aught else that had shape or form; and albeit I seem to see nothing, yet do I see all things.

When however I am separated from that Good, then is it given to me to see Christ who draweth me with such gentleness that sometimes He saith, 'Thou art I and I am thou.' I see those eyes and that face so gracious and pleasing, which embraceth and draweth my soul unto itself with infinite assurance. And that which proceedeth from those eyes and that face is nothing else save that Good of which I spake before and which I beheld darkly. . . . And it is that Good wherein I delight so greatly that I can in no wise speak of it.

Being thus one with Christ, the soul liveth. And in this God do I live more than in the darkness, and although he who dwelleth in the darkness draweth me beyond all comparison more strongly, yet do I live so constantly in Christ that, inasmuch as I have been once and for all granted assurance of

God, nothing can ever come betwixt me and Him. . . . Wherefore do I long to sing and to praise God, saying :

Thee do I praise, O God my delight, for upon Thy Cross have I made my bed and instead of a pillow have I found poverty, instead of repose have I found suffering and contempt, for upon this bed was He born, He lived and laid Him down to die. (181 sqq.)

Thus Angela recognized that when separated by darkness from God, what drew her with such gentleness through Christ, was nothing else save God incarnate in the Person of Christ, the mediator between the finite human self and the Infinite and Eternal God.

Here, though her experience is plainly her own, the language in which she tries to express it reminds at once of the Divine Dark of Dionysius, that ' darkness which is beyond light, in which we attain unto vision through the loss of sight and knowledge, that in thus ceasing to see or to know we may learn to know that which is beyond all perception and understanding, the unique Cause of all things, free from every limitation and beyond them all.' [1]

How did Angela, an ordinary unlettered woman, come thus to echo the language of neo-Platonic thought ? We are encouraged to think [2] that she borrowed her language from the *Laude* of Jacopone, with which she must of course have been familiar. He was a lawyer, a well-read man, acquainted with the works of Dionysius and S. Augustine, and through them with the teaching of Plato and Plotinus. This is thought to account for the phenomenon referred to in Miss Underhill's often-quoted remark, that in Angela,

[1] *Dionysius the Areopagite on the Divine Names and the Mystical Theology.* Ed. by C. E. Rolt ; pp. 194 sqq.

[2] Evelyn Underhill, ' Two Franciscan Mystics,' from *S. Francis of Assisi, Essays in Commemoration,* p. 330.

'we seem to hear Plotinus speaking from the Vale of Spoleto.' [1]

It remains to consider Angela in her creative aspect as a Mother of Souls. After she had learnt to give up her own will, 'to be to the Divine Goodness what his own hand is to a man,' she began to train others in the same way. There were many young priests among her disciples, which led to her being called *Mistress of Theologians*, and although we must go to her own book to study her teaching, we may glance briefly at its characteristics.

The foundation of it all was knowledge of God and knowledge of self, for these were bound, as she had proved in her own case, to produce true humility because of the painful contrast they disclosed between the absolute perfection of God and the sinfulness of self. 'Humility consists,' she said, 'in the soul beholding God and itself as it should (106). In no other way can a soul be cleansed save by deep humiliation' (23). She thus made her faults fruitful instead of discouraging, because she learnt from them distrust of self and confidence in God.

She next urged her disciples to constant consideration of the Cross and the Passion. 'Hold fast to the love and knowledge of Christ crucified, imitate Christ in all things.' But there were to be no excesses, no self-chosen penances :

> It is better to wait for God and patiently to bear that which He sendeth. He is the Heavenly Physician who sendeth affliction and adversity to purge and teach and make perfect the soul, and He knoweth better than ignorant man. (87.)

Christianity as interpreted by Angela was a life lived on heroic levels, a constant, cheerful conquest of difficulty. 'The wise soul,' she says, 'should seek for no other state in this world save that of

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism*, p. 418.

Christ, a state of pain, anguish, tribulation. It is a sign of little love, yea, of great presumption, if the soul should desire to feel in this world aught of Christ save pain' (89). Yet this was not to produce gloom or depression, for 'when the soul is assured of God, the body also receiveth health, satisfaction, and nobility.' Her own life might be described as a determination to find joy at the heart of suffering; she had given up her own will; therefore everything that happened to her was the will of God; therefore it was good and she gladly accepted it. Such is the disposition of the saints, a disposition in which they sit light to the world and find perfect freedom. Such self-giving, says Angela, is rewarded by gifts beyond what can be imagined.

> God cometh sometimes unto the soul when it hath neither called nor prayed unto Him. . . . And He doth instil into such a soul a fire and love and sweetness not customary, wherein it doth greatly rejoice. . . . For He doth embrace it with such love and draw it to Himself with such sweetness and gentleness that methinketh there is not a man in the world who can declare it. (24–28.)

From such experiences Angela came forth 'with her countenance resplendent and rosy, her eyes shining like candles' (28). Once when something had happened to her which she calls 'giving hospitality to the Pilgrim,' she writes:

> When my soul realized that it had given hospitality to the Pilgrim, it was filled with so wonderful a knowledge of the infinite goodness of God, that when I came to myself I understood clearly that the more one knows of God, the less one can speak of Him. . . . I know that all that the Scripture and that men have said about God since the beginning of the world, does not touch the depth, the marrow of His Being, and that it is, in comparison with Him, less than a point in comparison to the whole world.[1]

She taught her disciples utterly to disregard

[1] Ferré, *Oeuvres de Sainte Angèle*, p. 179.

moods and feelings, afflictions from which, as we have seen, she herself suffered much :

> 'When thou thinkest thyself to be most forsaken,' she said, 'then art thou most dearly beloved and nearest unto the Eternal God. . . . When it so happeneth that God depriveth thee of warmth or fervour, whether because of thine own fault (as is most often the case) or whether for the augmenting and strengthening of grace in thee, thou must nevertheless watch and pray and do good works as heretofore.' (107.)

She regarded it as the greatest privilege and honour to be allowed to suffer because that brought her nearer to Christ in His sufferings. She felt 'a holy envy' of all who were troubled and brightly underlines this by the remark, 'If only the worth and profit of tribulation were known, there would be great thieving of trouble' (142).

Again and again Angela repeats that it is death to her not to die ; 'her soul swung like a pendulum,' writes the Abbé Ferré, 'between these two limits of love, to suffer or to die.' She even made a little rhyme about it which she sang to her Lord, thus anticipating the well-known poem of S. Teresa, *Vivo sin vivir in mi* :

> I live, but yet I live not in myself
> For since aspiring to a life more high
> I ever die because I do not die. . . .
>
> Deliver me in mercy from this death
> And grant, O God, the gift of life at last,
> Nor let me linger in captivity
> Enchained to earth with bonds and fetters fast !
> I die with longing to behold Thee near
> And gain true life ! Without Thy presence dear
> Behold I die because I do not die ! [1]

In this refrain S. Teresa uses the very words of the Blessed Angela ; are we justified in concluding that the Spanish saint knew and studied the works

[1] *Minor Works of S. Teresa*, p. 6.

of her Italian forerunner? We know that S. Teresa owed much to the Franciscans; we know that Franciscan books were by her bedside and that a Latin edition of Angela's works appeared in Toledo five years before the birth of S. Teresa. So that they were available to her, and we may, I think, safely follow the Abbé Ferré in taking it as morally proved that Angela of Foligno was one of the spiritual guides of S. Teresa.

Though Angela impresses on her followers the need of prayer, defining with genius the various degrees of contemplative prayer, she insists again and again that nothing is of any use without true humility. 'Strive to be little and truly humble and meek, not only in outward works but in the depth of your hearts.' But humility in its turn is of no use without charity. 'Desire not only to have this charity amongst yourselves but likewise unto all people. For I say unto you that of a certainty my soul hath received more profit from weeping and lamenting over the sins of my neighbour, than over mine own.' Charity so transforms the soul that it is 'made one with God and God with it; it knoweth and enjoyeth with Him the most high things the which cannot be set forth in words nor imagined save by him who feeleth them.' And this growing, expanding vision of God awakens love for all things—

> Everything which hath its being from Him and which He loveth, doth He incite us also to love. Especially does He teach us to love those creatures in which we perceive He taketh an especial delight; for when the soul findeth the Supreme Being yearneth in love towards His creatures, then will it also yearn towards them. (130.)

From this Franciscan feeling for our brothers and sisters of the humbler creation she leads up to one of the most profound as well as one of the most

famous of all her sayings, ' All goodness cometh from the Love Uncreate and not from ourselves . . . we ourselves can work no good thing; whosoever feeleth this hath the spirit of truth ' (132).

Firmly convinced, like all the saints, that action is the real test of love, she echoes S. Augustine in echoing Jacopone's *Lauda, How true love cannot be idle* :

> Love, whoso knows Thee does not idle stand,
> For, tasting Thee, he finds so sweet a bliss,
> That day and night his longing still is fanned
> To love Thee more, make Thee more wholly His ;
> So blest the heart that shelters 'neath Thy hand !
> Nor can he tell, who knoweth naught of this,
> The honeyed taste, the savour that is Thine.[1]

Angela gives more explicit advice to her disciples :

> The love of God is never idle but constraineth us to follow in the way of the Cross. (132.) But the first step to be taken by the soul who . . . desireth to draw nigh unto God is to learn to know Him in very truth and not outwardly. For as we know so do we love. Therefore if we know but little and darkly, if we do reflect and meditate upon Him only superficially and fleetingly, we shall in consequence love Him but little. (136.)

Angela was apt to be impatient with that sort of flabby piety which is often mistaken for religion. She was aware, as we have seen, ' that those persons who do best know God are those who do the least presume to speak of Him.' She rebuked her young priests for reading in the Book of Life and ' rejecting its teaching in deed and will, act and intention.' But if she was severe with individual priests, she had deep love and reverence for the

[1] *Come il vero amare non è ozioso.* Translation quoted from Mrs. Theodore Beck's version in Evelyn Underhill's *Jacopone da Todi.*

Church. We have seen how large a part that influence played in her life. In her the mystical element was consistently balanced and supported by the institutional. Deeply as she was aware of the Indwelling Presence within her, she was equally aware of the direct and inexpressible gift received in the 'Sacrament of Love and Grace.' Herself a frequent communicant, she urged her flock to the same practice—

> Whosoever meaneth to come to this most holy Sacrament must consider to whom he cometh, how he cometh, and for what reason. For he cometh unto a certain good thing which is itself all good, the giver, maker, and possessor of all good. . . . This good thing sufficeth and filleth everything, satisfying all the saints and holy spirits, all those who are justified by grace and all the souls and bodies of the blessed who reign in everlasting glory. . . . And not only the holy angels but all the saints and the blessed do see and hear and stand ever before and within it . . . these blessed ones are ever here in the presence of God Uncreate . . .
>
> O Good Supreme, unconsidered, unknown, unloved but found by those who with their whole hearts entirely do desire Thee! (155.)

The *Treatise of Evangelical Doctrine* from which these passages are quoted is evidently a collection of letters and addresses to her spiritual children. With the exception of Ubertino da Casale, we know nothing about them, but of his relations with Angela we do know a good deal. He was a young friar who had been ardent in his novitiate, instructed in the higher contemplation by two Franciscans, Cecilia of Florence and our friend Pier Pettignano, the Comb-seller of Siena. But after Ubertino went to study in Paris, the distractions of that city and his always difficult health caused his spirit to be 'choked by worldly considerations.' It was Angela who rescued him, and it seems highly probable that a letter the Abbé Ferré has

transcribed from the Assisi manuscript was written by her to Ubertino.

'It seems to me,' she writes, 'that God is showing me all that is in you. My love is so intense that I ask Him to moderate it, for it seems to me that I am not in myself but in thee. If thou couldst only see into my heart, O my son, thou wouldst be constrained to do what God wishes.'[1]

She begs him not to be ungrateful to God who has taken him for His son. 'Grow! Grow! Grow!' she implores him, trying to make him realize the nobility of his vocation, to urge him to the heights.

It is enlightening to observe in this the suppleness of Angela's methods of direction. She feared love more than any other thing, yet when her 'tempestuous' son has broken loose she realizes that the whole strength of her affection is needed to pull him back. We know that it succeeded and that Angela must have had pleasure in this son who afterwards, in the tranquil solitude of La Verna, wrote the *Arbor Vitae Crucifixae Jesu*, a book of which Dante showed the influence in his *Divina Commedia*. In the Prologue to his book, Ubertino pays a tribute to Angela:

I was led in a wonderful manner to the Reverend Mother and Saint, Angela of Foligno, an angel living on the earth. . . . She restored, yea a thousandfold, all the gifts of my soul that I had lost through my own sinfulness. . . . When I had experienced the splendours of her flaming virtue, she changed the whole face of my mind; and so drove out the infirmities and langours from my soul and body and renewed my mind that before was rent with distractions, that no one who had known me before could doubt that the spirit of Christ was begotten anew in me through her.[2]

[1] *Revue d'histoire franciscaine*, July, 1925, p. 364; also Ferré, *Oeuvres de Sainte Angèle*, p. 365.

[2] *Acta Sanctorum*, Jan., I, 234. There quoted from the *Arbor Vitae*, Prolog. I, Lib. i.

In September, 1308, Angela became gravely ill. Knowing she was about to die she gathered her little family about her to give them her last injunctions :

'O my sons!' she said, 'I do commend to you to love one another. All my heritage I leave to you—the life of Christ, His poverty, His sufferings, His humiliation.'

She then laid her hand on each of her sons in turn and blessed him.

'It hath pleased the Divine Goodness,' she said, 'to give into my care all His sons and daughters in this world, both here and beyond the seas. I have cared for them and suffered for them, and my sufferings have been greater than you would believe. O my God! this day I give them back to Thee that Thou keep them and preserve them from all ill.' (259.)

She urged her sons to shun power and honour, to remain humble and meek. Just before she died she heard a voice saying to her :

'It is impossible that in death thou shouldst lose that which hath been impressed on thy heart in life. . . .'

And she did then lie in such tranquillity of body and joy of spirit that it seemed as if she already tasted somewhat of the joy which had been promised her. . . .

Thus did the venerable bride of Christ pass from the shipwreck of this world into the joys of heaven. (265.)

Angela died on a Friday, January 4, 1309. Those who have visited Foligno will remember how her fragile little figure lies calmly and pleasantly in its glass shrine in the Church of San Francesco where she worshipped. Her writings were approved by Cardinal Jacopo Colonna in 1310, but it was not till 1510 that they were translated and published in Italian, one of the earliest spiritual books to be printed in the vernacular in Italy. It soon became famous there, taking its place beside the *Little Flowers of S. Francis* and the *Divine Dialogue* of

S. Catharine of Siena. It was well known also in France, where François de Sales regarded it as one of his authorities. It appeared at Toledo in the beginning of the sixteenth century and was doubtless used by S. Teresa. In England we find it quoted in Augustine Baker's *Holy Wisdom*, and he used it also in the training of Gertrude More, his famous pupil. Thus the Middle Ages recognized Angela's greatness while in our own day she is comparatively unknown. The publication of the complete edition of her works, for which, as the Abbé Ferré points out, we have waited for seven hundred years, will, it is to be hoped, reawaken interest in this heroic but humble woman whose only complaint was that she 'wearied waiting for her Lord.'

'The positive quality of the saint,' says Algar Thorold, 'is love expressing itself in joy.' That phrase fitly sums up the life of the Blessed Angela of Foligno.

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THE LADY JULIAN OF NORWICH
1343–1413 *circa.*

IN this homely and courteous gentlewoman, who lived ' full gladly and merrily for love's sake,' we come to a spring whose life-giving waters seem to sparkle in the light of eternity. If the religious life of England afterwards tended to become heavy and dull, it was not the fault of Julian of Norwich, the first Englishwoman to write of spiritual things. Yet she did not belong to the sunshiney school of those who shut their eyes to the problems of sin and suffering ; she fully faced these problems, and saw that viewed from the right angle they lost their power to inflict deadly wounds. ' We may laugh in comforting of ourselves and joying in God for the devil is overcome,' she writes ; ' the Passion of our Lord is the overcoming of the Fiend.'

Though her language is so simple that any one can understand it, there is more in her homely words than we at first realize ; they seize on us with the fragrance and charm of fourteenth-century English, and suddenly we find our courteous gentlewoman is a philosopher in disguise. Poet and lover too, she had that genius for radiant little phrases which we find so often in the mystics ; they burst out spontaneously from a spirit which is both genial and profound. And her humility is attractive ; ' as to my sight ' is the modest phrase constantly on her lips. The better we get to know her, the more we feel

her spirit infecting us with her own gladness of unshakable belief. God is all-embracing; in Him is everything enclosed; He is nearer to us than our own souls; He is within us, conditioning and transforming us, taking pleasure in us, the little creatures He has made to co-operate in His work. He knows all about our weakness and looks on our falls and follies as a loving father might look on the escapades of a favourite child; to be deplored but not despaired about, for they will show us how to avoid the pitfalls another time.

The convincing quality of Julian's teaching comes from the fact that she is writing about something she has experienced; she does not merely know God, she possesses Him, sees Him, loves Him, and she insists gaily that we possess Him too. Her thought is clear and strong, flowing steadily over the rocks and shoals of human imperfection towards the vast Ocean of the Divine.

We know very little about Julian's youth. She does not seem to have been happy as a girl. She must always have been inclined to contemplation, and she seems to have been forced to do things that health and inclination made difficult for her. Various considerations justify us in inferring that she was of gentle birth; she may have been brought up by the Benedictine nuns of Carrow whose convent stood on a hill above the river near Norwich and where the daughters of the chief families of that district were sent to be educated.

In accordance with the culture of her time, Julian's education may have included writing, reading, Latin, French, needlework, and 'the common teaching of Holy Church.' But she tells us that she was a simple creature who 'cowde no letter.' If that means that she could not write, then her *Revelations* must have been dictated

through her window, for she was an anchoress who lived alone except for her two maidens. It is evident, however, that she did know some Latin, so that her remark about being unlettered may only reveal that she was inclined to belittle her own attainments. For though her reflections on her *Shewings* are largely the result of experience, she was plainly a woman of great intelligence and the works of others in the same line of country were evidently known to her.

We do not know whether she herself became a Benedictine nun ; we do not even know whether she was already a recluse by the time she received those *Revelations of Divine Love* which tell us incidentally all that we know about her outward life. It is possible that she was still living at home when she received her *Revelations,* and that it was in consequence of them that she became an anchoress. Her home was probably near the sea, for she speaks of the ' sea-ground, of hills and dales green, seeming as it were moss be-grown.' [1]

As a young girl she had desired three gifts of God. The first was that she might realize the Passion as vividly as if she had been with Mary Magdalene at the foot of the Cross : ' methought I had some feeling in it, but yet I desired more by the grace of God.'

Her second request was the outcome of the first and was evidently prompted—like Angela's thirty spiritual steps—by meditation on the thirty hidden years of the life of Christ and how He at thirty had begun His active redemptive life of suffering. Julian asked that at thirty she should ' suffer sickness as hard as to death,' that she might in that sickness ' suffer all manner of pains bodily and ghostly, except the outpassing of the soul,' in order

[1] *Dublin Review,* July, 1927, p. 133.

that she might be purified through pain and afterwards live more to the glory of God. Even here at the beginning she is docile and submissive. 'Lord! Thou knowest what I would!' she prayed, 'if it be Thy will that I have it—and if it be not Thy will, good Lord, be not displeased, for I will naught but as Thou wilt' (5).

Her third request was suggested to her by 'hearing a man tell the story of S. Cecilia'; Julian prayed that she too might receive three wounds in her life—those of contrition, compassion, and steadfast longing towards God. Though the first two were forgotten, the third 'dwelt with her continuously.'

But when she was thirty years old, the sickness she had desired fell upon her. And although suggestion doubtless played a part in this, no natural explanation covers the character of the Revelations she received in that illness. For three days and nights she was acutely ill; on the fourth night her attendants thought she was dying; a priest came and gave her Extreme Unction. Her mother lifted up her hand to 'lock her eyes for she weened she had been dead.' In the morning she was paralysed from the waist down. She asked her women to prop her up in bed to ease her breathing; the priest came again and set up a crucifix where her eyes could rest on it. Her sight began to fail—

> And it was all dark about me in the chamber, as if it had been night, save in the Image of the Cross whereon I beheld a common light and I wist not how. . . . After this the upper part of my body began to die. . . . And then I weened in sooth to have passed. (7.)

Then suddenly all pain left her, power came back to her; still propped up with the crucifix before her eyes, she was inwardly prompted to ask for the

second wound, that she might truly enter into the Passion of Christ. It was then that her *Revelations* began.

For five hours she lay in a sort of trance. Her eyes were fixed on the crucifix, utter concentration on which banished all other thoughts from her mind. In this state of profound recollection, her soul widely opened out towards the spiritual world, 'a *Revelation of Love* was made to her by Jesus Christ, our endless bliss.' From four in the morning till nine, on May 8, 1373, Fifteen Shewings appeared to her; they reached her in three ways, by 'bodily sight, intellectual vision, and spiritual insight.'[1] During the Shewings she felt no bodily sensations, but as soon as they ceased and she knew she was to 'live and languish' her pains and weakness returned. 'I moaned and cried for feeling of my bodily pains and for failing of comfort spiritual and bodily.'

Then a 'religious person' came and asked her how she was. When Julian said she had been delirious he laughed at her; but when she went on to describe how she had seen the crucifix before her face 'to bleed fast,' he 'waxed all sober and marvelled.' Julian was abashed that her experiences should be regarded with such reverence. She would have liked to confess them all to a priest but then reflected, How could she expect a priest to believe what she hardly believed herself? She slept for a little, having in her sleep a vision of the Fiend, which she took to signify the doubt that troubled her, and so on waking she accepted all that had been shown her, 'Fleeing thereto as to my comfort I was brought to great rest and peace without sickness of body or dread of conscience' (167).

[1] A classification originally made by S. Augustine.

The next night a final Revelation was granted her.

I saw the Soul so large as it were an endless world and as it were a blissful kingdom. . . . In the midst . . . sitteth our Lord Jesus. And worshipfully He sitteth in the soul, straight-set in peace and rest. The Godhead ruleth and sustaineth heaven and earth . . . but the place Jesus taketh in our soul, He shall never remove from it . . . for in us is His homeliest home and His endless dwelling. . . .

And He gave me to know soothfastly that it was He that showed me all afore . . . and said full sweetly: *Wit it now well that it was no raving that thou sawest to-day but take it and believe it and keep thee therein and comfort thee therewith and trust thou thereto; and thou shalt not be overcome.* (169.)

Julian adds with joy, 'He said not Thou shalt not be tempested, thou shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be afflicted, but He said, *Thou shalt not be overcome*' (170).

It is these *Revelations* with her subsequent reflections on them which form Julian's book. Two versions of it exist; what is supposed to be the earlier of the two[1] is a sort of framework, which Julian filled in during many years' reflection on the Shewings made to her that May morning. It is from this second version as edited by Miss Grace Warrack that I make my quotations.[2]

Though we know so little about Julian's training, it is evident that by the time of her *Revelations* she had been 'led so deep into God that she truly knew her own soul' (136). She had passed the stage of eagerly desiring anything for herself; it is one of her most endearing characteristics that

[1] *The Shewings of Lady Julian*, transcribed into modern English by Rev. Dundas Harford. 3rd ed. London, 1925.

[2] *Revelations of Divine Love*, recorded by Julian, Anchoress at Norwich. Edited by Grace Warrack. 8th ed. London, 1923.

she always wants to be giving, 'in all this was I greatly stirred to mine even-Christians.' She wrote down her *Revelations* because she wanted others to see and know what she saw and knew. She felt herself right naught, just an ordinary faulty little human creature. But through years of patient training she had cleansed a mirror in which the reflection of Divine Love might be seen. The fact of the Revelation having been made to her did not affect her humility.

> For truly it was not showed me that God loved me better than the least soul that is in grace, for I am certain that there be many that never had Shewing nor sight but of the common teaching of the Church, that love God better than I. For if I look singularly to myself, I am right naught, but in the general body I am in oneness of charity with all mine even-Christians. For in this oneness standeth the life of all mankind that shall be saved. For God is all that is good, as to my sight, and God hath made all that is made and God loveth all that He hath made; and he that loveth generally all his even-Christians for God, he loveth all that is. . . . For in man is God and God is in all. . . . And therefore I pray you all for God's sake and counsel you for your own profit, that ye leave the beholding of a poor creature that it was showed to, and mightily, wisely, meekly behold God that of His courteous love and endless goodness would show it generally in comfort of us all. For it is God's will that ye take it with great joy and pleasance as if Jesus had showed it to you all. (19.)

Before acting on Julian's advice we should perhaps glance for a moment at her background. Edward III was king at the time of her Revelations, but she lived on through the reigns of Richard II and Henry IV. She lived within the period of the Hundred Years' War. As a child she lived through the dread and ravaging visit of the Black Death to her own county of Norfolk (1348). The great English Cathedrals were being built. Salisbury and the nave of Wells were already com-

pleted; Norwich was graced by its stone spire about 1365. The Perpendicular style was being evolved.

In politics Church and State strove against each other and each had recourse to that Maiden Meed, Bribery, as we read in the *Vision of Piers Plowman*, published nine years before Julian's *Revelations*. It is interesting to remember that while in the first version of that poem the author merely condemns such sins as the buying of official pardons, in the second, which appeared four years after Julian's vision, he is able to state in what a righteous life consists. To do well, he says, is to act righteously to man in fear of God; to do better is to walk in the way of love; to do best is to live in fellowship with Christ and His Church and humbly to bring forth fruit from that union.

This teaching was no doubt inspired by Julian's great contemporaries, for alongside the prevailing laxity in the Church, a springing of spiritual life was aroused by three other mystics—Richard Rolle, who died when Julian was six; the unknown author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, and Walter Hilton, both of whom were her contemporaries. She was the last in time of this little band, her work forming 'a fitting crown to the golden period of English mysticism.'[1]

As to her cultural background, she seems to have imbibed a good deal of the neo-Platonic doctrine which flowed into the Church through S. Augustine, acquiring a Christian flavour on the way. It seems pretty certain that she was acquainted with the teaching of her German contemporaries, Suso and Tauler; while passages in which she reminds us of the thought and language of Ruysbroeck, her great Flemish contemporary, are explained by the

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics of the Church*, p. 131.

presence of a Flemish colony in Norwich.[1] And it is plain that she knew the *Scale of Perfection* which Walter Hilton had written for an anchoress like herself.

It has, however, been claimed that Julian, 'an untaught maiden, was led by the logic of the heart straight to some of the speculative doctrines of the philosophical mystics.'[2] Both views are needed to explain her. But whatever her indebtedness to others, she is refreshingly original. She has a homely way of looking at things, of stating the deepest truths in the simplest way. And while the poetry of her words and the humour that sparkles through her book make it a delight to read, we cannot read it without being infected by its brave and sunny way of facing life, above all by its conviction that our lives matter to God.

Some idea of the outward circumstances of her life may be gained from the *Ancren Riwle*, written for the guidance of recluses at Tarrent in the early thirteenth century, as well as from Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*. It was not unusual at that time for an anchoress to live in a cell built against the wall of a church, and traces of Julian's tiny cell can still be seen against the south wall of S. Julian's Church at Norwich. She had two maidens to wait on her; one might be sent out to procure necessities, the other would remain as a bulwark between her mistress and the world. Thus the *Ancren Riwle* charges the recluse, 'When you have to go to your parlour window, learn from your maiden who it is that is come, for it may be some one you ought to shun.' Julian's cell might have three windows:

[1] For a discussion of this whole subject see Miss Underhill's paper on 'Julian of Norwich,' in her *Essentials of Mysticism*, a source to which I am much indebted.

[2] Inge, *Christian Mysticism*, p. 202.

the first looking into the church, through which she could hear Mass; the second, looking into the quarters of her maidens; the third, the parlour window, looking out to the world, through which she spoke to those who came to ask counsel of her. This window was to be small and loved as little as possible. The cloth on it was to be twofold, black with a white cross on it through which the sun might shine. And the significance of the light reaching the anchoress through the Cross was not forgotten. Though strictly enclosed, such a life was to be at the service of the community. Hilton wrote thus to the anchoress he directed:

> Now since it is that thou owest not to go out of thine house for to seek occasion how thou mightest profit thine even-Christian by deeds of mercy because thou art enclosed, nevertheless thou art bound for to love them all in thine heart and to them that come to thee for to show them tokens of love soothfully. Therefore whoso will speak with thee . . . be soon ready with a good will for to wit what his will is. Be not aloof . . . but look how ready and glad thou wouldest be if an angel of heaven would come to speak to thee. So ready and buxom be thou in will for to speak with thine even-Christian when he cometh to thee. . . . And though thou be in prayer or devotion that thee thinketh loath for to break off, for thee thinketh thou shouldest not leave God for man's speech . . . if thou be wise thou shalt not leave God but find Him and have Him and see Him in thine even-Christian as well as in prayer. . . . Whoso come to thee, ask him meekly what he will . . . hear him gladly and suffer him to say what he will for ease of his own heart. And when he hath done, comfort him if thou can goodly and charitably, and soon break off. [1]

However inconvenient the visitor might be, he was to be graciously welcomed, and the anchoress was not to think much of herself because people came thus to ask her advice. 'What is a man but his thoughts and his loves?' Hilton asks. 'As

[1] Walter Hilton, *Scale of Perfection*, i. 83.

mickle as thou lovest God and thine even-Christian, and knowest Him, so mickle is thy soul.' [1]

In reading Julian we should have such a picture of her before our eyes, for the advice she gave was given to those men and women who came to her parlour window. She dealt thus with the ordinary stuff of life, not with those specially set apart. This explains the simplicity of her direction compared, say, with that of Angela of Foligno who had many priests among her spiritual sons, or with that of S. Teresa who wrote for the contemplative nuns of her own foundations. Julian's advice may seem simpler, is indeed simpler, yet its very simplicity is apt to deceive us as to the profound knowledge and experience from which it springs.

The life of the anchoress was to be as a sheet-anchor to the Church tossing on stormy seas. It was in the truest sense a redemptive life, lived as truly for others as any outwardly active life could be. By her quiet willed attention to God, Julian forged for the Church a strong link with the Abiding, while she prepared in herself a channel through which the Revelation of Love could flow out to other souls.

As to her daily practice, the *Riwle* decreed that the anchoress was to eat sparingly and to be well content with her clothes—' be they white, be they black ; only see that they be plain and warm and well made.' She was to begin the day by adoring the Blessed Sacrament through the window looking into the church. Much of her time was to be spent in private and liturgic prayer and in reading : ' Often ye ought to pray less that ye may read more. For reading is good prayer.' As a rest from the strain of contemplation she was to ' shape and mend and sew church vestments and poor people's

[1] Op. cit., i. 88.

clothes,' as well as garments for herself and her maidens. She was thus kept in touch with the church and the poor ; her mind was fed and kept abreast of her time by reading ; the different elements were evenly developed, though she was to imitate Mary rather than Martha. She was not to possess any beast, ' except only a cat,' and though we cannot know whether Julian acted on such a permission, we hope she did enjoy the society of a furry friend.

The beginnings of such a life, according to the *Riwle,* are nothing but ball-play, a courtship to draw the anchoress with love to Christ ; but when He is assured her love is fixed, then He may begin to correct her faults, for ' whoso leads a life of exemplary piety may be sure of being tempted. The higher the tower the more it catches the wind.'

But to go back to Julian's *Revelations* : they came to her in three ways. In answer to her request that she might realize the sufferings of Christ, she had several vivid and detailed visions of the Passion. In the first Revelation, for instance, when propped up in bed, her eyes fixed on the crucifix :

> Suddenly I saw the red blood trickle down from under the Garland, hot and freshly and right plenteously as it were the time of His Passion when the Garland of thorns was pressed on His blessed head. (8.)

This bodily vision, and others of the same kind, were no doubt unconscious memories of pictures she had seen in illuminated Psalters and Books of Hours, as well as on the walls of churches. And it should be remembered that the whole devotional conception of her time dwelt intensely on the Passion.[1] But even although these visualizings of

[1] See consideration of this also in ' Julian of Norwich ' in Evelyn Underhill's *Essentials of Mysticism,* pp. 184 sqq.

the content of her mind are not the important part of her *Revelations*, yet she entered by them so fully into the sufferings of Christ that they suggested many fruitful thoughts, such, for instance, as these :

We have matter of mourning because our sin is the cause of Christ's sufferings ; but we have also matter of joy for the endless love which made Him to suffer. (124.)

He is to us everything that is good and comfortable ; He is our clothing that for love wrappeth us, claspeth us, and all-becloseth us for tender love that He may never leave us, being to us all-thing that is good. (10.)

And it was through her intense devotion to the second Person of the Trinity that she was led into deep contemplative experience of God.

Also He showed me a little thing the quantity of a hazelnut in the palm of my hand, and it was as round as a ball ; I looked thereon with the eye of my understanding and thought, What may this be ? And it was generally answered thus, It is all that is made. . . . It lasteth and ever shall last, for God loveth it. (10.)

In thus seeing all creation as a tiny hazel-nut over against the Immensity of the Creator, Julian was led to realize that the reason why man is restless and ill at ease is because he seeks rest in ephemeral things in which there is no rest, and seeks not God who is ' All-mighty, All-wise, and All-good. For He is the Very Rest.' She was also shown that it is ' full great pleasance to God that a helpless soul come to Him simply and plainly and homely.' Such is the instinctive yearning of the soul, and it inspired in Julian this prayer :

God ! of Thy Goodness give me Thyself ; for Thou art enow to me and I may nothing ask that is less that may be full worship to Thee ; and if I ask anything that is less ever me wantith—but only in Thee have I all. (11.)

Then she began to think about prayer, how

because we do not understand what God wants, we bother about means. Means, she reflects, count for nothing; His Goodness includes everything. But so long as we realize that means are only of value to lead us to God and not as ends in themselves, then we may and should use them. S. Teresa was later to confess to a weakness for a nicely decked oratory, and S. François de Sales, though he knew candles and incense and processions were of no use to God, knew also that they could be of great use to man. And so he advised such aids to reach our hearts through the senses and raise them up to God, realizing always, as Julian says, that 'He is the Goodness of all.'

For as the body is clad in the cloth, and the flesh in the skin, and the bones in the flesh, and the heart in the chest, so are we, soul and body, clad in the Goodness of God and enclosed. Yea, and more homely: for all these may waste and wear away but the Goodness of God is ever whole . . . for truly our Lover desireth that our soul cleave to Him with all its might. . . . For of all things that heart may think, this pleaseth most God, and soonest speedeth the soul. . . .

God is all that is good, and the goodness that each thing hath, it is He. (14.)

She considers how the instinctive will of man is to have God and the good will of God is to have man:

He willeth that we be so occupied in knowing and loving and therefore was this lesson of Love showed with all that followeth. For of all things the beholding and the loving of God make the soul appear less in its own eyes and must fill it with humility and reverent dread, with love for its even-Christian. (15.)

In all her strivings to tell us of the ineffable things she has experienced, Julian is filled with a sense of awed delight; it is wonderful to her that a great Lord and solemn King should be homely and intimate with a poor servant, and yet, she exults,

' Thus fareth it with our Lord Jesus and with us ! ' Like Mechthild, she insists on the given-ness of grace, the implanting of the desire for God by God Himself. And the way for man to reach that state where he fain would be, is to attend only to God, forgetting self and ' stying up his heart by desire.'

For we are now so blind and unwise that we never seek God till He of His goodness show Himself to us. And when we aught see of Him graciously, then are we stirred by the same grace to seek with great desire to see Him more blissfully. And thus I saw Him and sought Him ; and I had Him, I wanted Him. And this is, and should be our common working in this life as to my sight. . . . For He will be seen and He will be sought : He will be abided and He will be trusted. (22.)

This insistence on God's desire for the love and trust of His little human creature, she summed up in one of her most radiant phrases : *We are God's bliss, for in us He enjoyeth without end.* But she was well aware of the difficulty of preserving a joyful, trustful spirit through the inevitable days of dimness and desolation. Yet this very dimness of man's apprehension of God was, she thought, to be taken as a sign that the continual seeking and thirsting of the soul ' pleased God full greatly,' for after all it can do no more than seek and suffer and trust. Thus she was taught the great truth that ' seeking is as good as beholding for the time that He will suffer the soul to be in travail.' We come gradually to realize that, though Julian's teaching may appear simple, the demands it makes are complete. The living of this doctrine, for instance, that seeking is as good as beholding, will require all the courage and perseverance of which the little human creature is capable. In this seeking we are, according to Julian, to aim at three things : to seek earnestly and without sloth ; to

await God's pleasure patiently without murmuring or striving against Him; and thirdly, to trust Him mightily.

For His working is privy; He willeth to be perceived, His appearance shall be swiftly sudden and He willeth to be trusted. For He is full gracious and homely. Blessed may He be! (25.)

When we come to consider Julian's doctrine of sin, we have to remember how the Middle Ages regarded it. There is in many modern minds a difficulty in reconciling the fact of sin and suffering with the goodness of God. In Julian's day this softness as regards pain did not exist, nor was the happiness of the creature regarded as the chief end of life. She would have approved the words learnt by the Scottish child in its so-called *Shorter Catechism*. To the question, 'What is the chief end of man?' the child answers, 'The chief end of man is to glorify God.' This being so and God being All-powerful, the Maker of all that is, Julian wondered how she was to reconcile the fact of sin and suffering and human failure, with the omnipotence of God. In her third Revelation she saw God in a point, by which she understood that He is in all things.

I beheld and considered, seeing and knowing in sight with a soft dread and thought: *What is sin?* For I saw truly that God doeth all thing, be it never so little. And I saw truly that nothing is done by hap or adventure, but all things by the foreseeing wisdom of God. . . . Wherefore me behoveth needs to grant that all thing that is done, it is well-done: for our God doeth all. . . . For He is in the Mid-point of all thing and all He doeth. And I was certain He doeth no sin. . . . And here I saw verily that sin is no deed; for in all this was not sin showed. (27.)

Though she seems to claim here that sin is merely a negation, in a later Shewing she saw that nothing

'letted' or hindered her from full enjoyment of God, but sin. She considered that if sin had not been, then man would have been clean as when God made him, and she wondered why in the foreseeing wisdom of God the beginning of sin was not 'letted'? She was answered, 'It behoved that there should be sin, but all shall be well.' She was abashed that this was said to her 'full tenderly,' attributing no blame to her or any that had sinned, and so she reflected it would be great discourtesy to God to reproach Him for her sin or despair too much about it herself, seeing that He did not blame her for it. She recognized that here was a 'marvellous high mystery' hid in God which He should reveal to us in heaven.

But the problem of sin continued to disturb her; she reflected on it, grew confused about it, and finally arrived at the conclusion that it was a necessary evil, a doctrine which, if she did learn it from Eckhart, she expressed in a fresh and original way, 'Sins,' she says, 'are not wounds but worships'; if they can be utilized and turned to our benefit, then they become honourable and salutary, a sort of medicine to purify us, to prevent us from becoming self-satisfied, to humble us and make us ready for heaven. But she considers, further, that man has a lower and a higher self, probably here echoing the neo-Platonic doctrine of which she had heard.

> In every soul that shall be saved is a Godly Will that never assented to sin, nor ever shall: yet though this Godly Will is knitted and endlessly oned with God, the redemption and again-buying of mankind is needful and speedful in everything. (128.)

Though Julian realized that this redemption and again-buying was triumphantly accomplished through the Passion of Christ, another difficulty now arose in her mind. How was she to reconcile

the Church doctrine of the punishment of the damned with this saying? Her perplexity was answered by a further Showing:

> That which is impossible to thee is not impossible to me; I shall save my word in all things and shall make all things well. . . . For this is the great deed that our Lord shall do, in which Deed He shall save His word. . . . How it shall be done there is no creature beneath Christ that knoweth it. (67.)

She must not try to fathom secrets not meant for her to fathom. 'Let all be love, my dearworthy child,' was the counsel now given her: no anxious wondering, nothing but love and trust. Julian could never contemplate the existence of anger in God. Her disciplines were sent by the same God who said to her, 'I love thee and thou lovest Me, and our love shall never be disparted in two.' Our lives were rooted and grounded in love; we were so closely and everlastingly united to God in love that it was impossible He could be angry with us, 'for where God is, there wrath has no place.' If His children should fall in their haste to reach Him, though they hurt themselves and tumble in the mud, it is not wrath that such accidents arouse in God. Julian wrote a parable to illustrate this in which the courteous Lord says of his servant:

> Lo, Lo, my loved Servant, what harm and distress he hath taken in my service for my love, yea, and for his goodwill. Is it not fitting that I award him for his affright and his dread, his hurt and his maim and all his woe? And not only this, but falleth it not to me to give a gift that shall be better to him, and more worshipful, than his own wholeness should have been? or else methinketh I should do him no grace. (109.)

It is of course plain that what Julian generally means by sin is rather a wrong attitude of mind, a hopeless and therefore ungrateful despondency, than any deadly or deliberate act. Of the two sins she does recognize, 'the one is impatience or sloth, the other despair or doubtful dread.' These,

she thinks, are the two failings which most ' travail and tempest us ' ; we are to cure them by thinking of our Lord's patience in His Passion ; if only we loved Him enough we would bear them gladly and that would be pleasing to Him and endlessly profitable to ourselves.

Our courteous Lord willeth not that His servants despair, for our falling hindereth Him not to love us. (80.)

But while Julian recognized that sin could be used by God to lead man to bliss, she was careful to guard against the possibility of any one thinking that in that case it would be well to sin to achieve the greater good. ' To me was shown no greater hell than sin,' she says, and to realize the strength of this saying we have only to remember what a flaming reality hell was to the fourteenth century.

When we come to consider Julian's teaching on prayer, we see that by prayer she means a ' oneing of the soul with God ' ; not any attempt to persuade God to do things, but a giving of the self to Him and in that spirit trying to serve His purposes. She was filled with awe at the everlasting marvel of the overpassing love God has to His children : because of that she says, ' We may ask of our Lover with reverence what we will ' (14). She is taught that we must never rely on feelings. Sometimes, she says, our trust is not full ; we think it is because of our unworthiness that we feel nothing ; and this is our folly, that we should consider feelings of any importance.

And all this brought our Lord suddenly to my mind and showed these words and said *I am Ground of thy beseeching* ; first it is My will that thou have it ; and after I make thee to will it ; and after, I make thee to beseech it and thou beseechest it. How should it then be that thou shouldest not have thy beseeching ? (84.)

Considering this Julian reflects that it is impossible we should desire mercy and grace and not have it. 'For everything that our good Lord maketh us to beseech, Himself hath ordained it to us from the beginning.' She is trying to say what S. Augustine and Jacopone had already said, *Thou art the love wherewith the heart loves Thee!* What Pascal said, *Tu ne me chercherais pas si tu ne me possédais*. Enfolded, embraced, penetrated, and inspired by God, the prayer of His little human creature flies back to Him as the needle to the magnet.

> Full glad and merry is our Lord of our prayer. . . . He makes us like to Him in condition as in kind. Therefore He saith thus, Pray inwardly though thee thinketh it savour thee not; for it is profitable, though thou feel naught, though thou see naught; yea, though thou think thou canst not. For in dryness and in barrenness, in sickness and in feebleness, then is thy prayer well pleasant to Me though thou think it savour thee naught but little. And so is all thy believing prayer in My sight. (86.)

Though all the mystics knew and wrote of the state of desolation and loneliness, none of them recognized it more truly as a passing cloud to be steadily worked and suffered through. Julian tells us how she learned this lesson. Once she was filled with a 'sovereign ghostly pleasance, with everlasting sureness and mightily sustained.' This feeling was 'so glad and so ghostly (i.e. supernatural) that she was in all peace and rest, there was nothing in earth that could then have grieved her. But that lasted only a little while. Then came such heaviness and weariness of life and irksomeness of self that she could scarcely bear to live.' This happened to her (seventh Revelation) about twenty times in quick succession, and she took it to mean that it was healthy for the soul sometimes

to be in comfort and sometimes to be left desolate by itself.

But God willeth that we know that He keepeth us ever alike secure in woe and weal. . . . And both is one love. . . . Bliss is lasting but pain is passing. . . . (36.) Prayer and trust must both alike be large. (87.)

While Julian insists all through her book on the given-ness of grace, she insists too that it is not enough to know that everything will be given; while realizing this, 'we must do our debt and pray forthwithal; so is He worshipped and we sped.' We must do our part, and yet when we have done, says Julian, anticipating by a few years the author of the *Imitation*, 'then shall us yet think that it is naught. But if we do as we can and ask in truth for mercy and grace, all that faileth us we shall find in Him.'

She encourages and delights us by her constant insistence that what we do is the cause of pleasure to God. In an age which is apt to take its religion heavily, her assurance as to the happiness of God in His children is heartening:

He would have us to understand that the noblest thing that He ever made is mankind. . . . For He beholdeth us in love and would make us partners of His good deed and therefore stirreth us to pray for that which it pleaseth Him to do. . . . God showed so great pleasure and so great content as though He were much beholden to us for every good deed that we do—and yet it is He that doeth it! (90.)

After carefully considering the willed prayer of the creature she comes to that ineffable experience in which her courteous Lord of His grace showed Himself to her soul.

And this is an high unperceivable prayer as to my sight; for all the cause wherefor we pray, it is oned into the sight and beholding of Him to whom we pray; marvellously enjoying with reverent dread and with so great sweetness and delight

in Him that we can pray right naught but as He stirreth us. And well I wot, the more a soul seeth of God, the more it desireth Him by His grace.

But when we see Him not so, then feel we need and cause to pray, because of failing, for enabling of ourself to Jesus. For when the soul is tempested, troubled, and left to itself by unrest, then it is time to pray, for to make itself pliant and obedient to God. . . . Then our good Lord followeth us, helping our desire ; and when we of His special grace plainly behold Him . . . then we follow Him and He draweth us unto Him by love.

Then shall we with His sweet grace in our own meek continuant prayer come unto Him now in this life by many privy touchings of sweet spiritual sights and feeling, measured as our simpleness may bear it. . . . And then shall we all come into our Lord, our self clearly knowing and God fully having ; and we shall endlessly be all had in God : Him verily seeing and fully feeling, Him spiritually hearing and Him delectably smelling and sweetly swallowing.

And then shall we see God face to face, homely and fully. The creature that is made shall see and endlessly behold God which is the Maker. (92.)

Thus in the simplest language of everyday life Julian seeks to express that utter self-loss in God which might be considered the supreme end of prayer, the supreme joy of the mystic. But his consecration and self-giving is so complete that spiritual joy is not his aim. His union with God must be a life-giving union ; his training has fashioned him into an instrument with which God can work on other souls. ' A widespread love to all in common ' was thus to inspire both the prayer and action of the anchoress ; her deepest contemplation was to be gladly interrupted to deal with the humblest need of any who might come to her. This supple and generous way of life, in which the smallest things were sanctified and seen in the light of eternity, sheds a mellow and lovely radiance on Julian's parlour window.

And through the side window into the church she was kept in touch with the institutional ; she

understood the necessity and strength of corporate religion.

For He willeth that we take us mightily to the Faith of Holy Church. . . . For one single person may oftentimes be broken . . . but the whole body of Holy Church was never broken nor never shall be. . . . And therefore a sure thing it is, a good and a gracious, to will meekly and mightily to be fastened and oned to our Mother, Holy Church, that is Christ Jesus. For the food of mercy that is His dear-worthy blood and precious water is plenteous to make us fair and clean; the blessed wounds of our Saviour be open to enjoy and heal us; the sweet, gracious hands of our Mother be ready and diligently about us. It is His office to save us: it is His worship to do for us and it is His will that we know it, for He willeth that we love Him sweetly and trust in Him meekly and mightily. And this showed He in these gracious words, *I keep thee full surely*. (155.)

Like Mechthild, Julian was assured that the death of Christ alone had unlocked the gates of heaven. In her Eighth Shewing, of the agonies of the Passion, she was tempted to look up from her Crucifix, 'but she durst not, for away from the Cross was no sureness.' Then she was tempted inwardly to seek another way to heaven than through the Cross. This temptation she answered with all the energy of her soul:

Nay! I may not; for Thou art my Heaven. . . . I would liever have been in that pain till Doomsday than come to Heaven otherwise than by Him. For I wist well that He that bound me so sore, would unbind me when He would. . . . Meliked none other Heaven than Jesus. (42.)

And thinking of His joy in suffering for us she reflects that when we bear anything for others, 'it is Christ in us.' She feels that when He is in pain we are in pain, but the harder our pains have been with Him on the Cross, the greater our joy shall be with Him in heaven. Meditating on His physical thirst on the Cross, she thinks of His eternal thirst for man. 'For this is the spiritual thirst of Christ;

the love-longing to have us altogether whole in Him.'

Later on, probably after some years' reflection, she comes to regard Christ in a way strange to English mysticism, as the Mother of the thirsting soul.

We know that all our mothers' bearing is us to pain and to dying : and what is this but that our Very Mother Jesus, He —All-Love—beareth us to joy and endless living ? . . . Thus He sustaineth us within Himself in love ; and travailed, until the full time that He would suffer the sharpest throes and most grievous pains that ever were or shall be ; and died at the last. And when He had finished and borne us to bliss, yet might not all this make full content to His marvellous love. . . .

This fair lovely word *Mother*, it is so sweet and so close in Nature of itself, that it may not verily be said of none but Him. . . . The kindly loving Mother that witteth and knoweth the need of her child, she keepeth it full tenderly, as the nature and condition of Motherhood will. And as it waxeth in age, she changeth her working, but not her love. . . . She suffereth that it be beaten in breaking down of vices. . . . This working with all that be fair and good, our Lord doeth it. . . . And He willeth that we know this ; for He will have our love fastened on Him. . . . And after this He suffereth some of us to fall more hard and more grievously than ever we did before. . . . And then ween we that all were naught that we have begun. But this is not so. For it needeth us to fall and it needeth us to see it. For if we never fell, we should not know how feeble and how wretched we are of ourself and also we should not fully know the marvellous love of our Maker. . . . For strong and marvellous is that love which may not, nor will not be broken for trepass. . . . But oftentimes when our falling and wretchedness is showed us, we are so sore adread . . . that scarcely we can find where we may hold us. But then willeth not our courteous Mother that we flee away. . . . But He willeth then that we use the condition of a child : for when it is hurt, or adread, it runneth hastily to the mother for help, with all its might. So willeth He that we do as a meek child, saying thus, My kind Mother, my gracious Mother, my dearworthy Mother, have mercy on me : I have made myself foul and unlike to Thee and I nor may nor can amend it but with Thine help and graces. (151 sqq.)

Thus as little children, blind and ignorant, we are to love God, not to fear Him; to give all our interests into His hands and to accept whatever comes with joy. Emphasis on joy is characteristic of Julian's whole teaching which might be summed up in a triad such as she herself was fond of using, as an insistence on love and trust and joy. She has no use for fuss or strain; when she was once inclined to worry about some one who came to her for advice and did not seem to be getting on, she was given the breezy admonition, 'Take it generally!' (70), a more useful lesson than many which sound more impressive. Though she was never canonized Julian would well have fulfilled the requirement of the Roman Catholic Church, that the servant of God considered for canonization 'should be proved to have possessed and to have transmitted a deep spiritual joy.' [1]

Like Angela, and like S. Catharine of Siena, with whom she has a good deal in common, she had, as we have seen, both an intimate devotion to Christ and a profound contemplative experience of God. But Julian is more simple, or, to use her own word, more homely, than either of them, and her splendid belief in humanity as enfolded and inspired by God, is her own. She is fully aware of the *tremendum* of the Holy, but she is also aware of its intimate loveliness. She sees her Creator in the tiniest things, she is conscious of His joy in the little human creatures He has made for Himself; and it is in this confident and joyous spirit that we like to think of her at her parlour window, passing on the good news she has received:

> Glad and joyous and sweet is the blissful lovely Cheer of our Lord to our souls, she says. (175.) Everything else may pass away but the Goodness of God is ever whole. . . .

[1] Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses*, Second Series, p. 242.

For many years she meditated on the *Revelations* made to her as a young woman of thirty. As she grew and deepened she found new meanings in them, gave them different interpretations. Yet she always felt she had not fully grasped their real significance. It was fifteen years after her illness that this final message was revealed to her ' ghostly understanding.'

Wouldst thou learn thy Lord's meaning in this thing ?
Learn it well : Love was His meaning.
Who showed it thee ?
Love.
What showed He thee ?
Love.
Wherefore showed it He ?
For Love.
Hold thee therein and thou shalt learn and know more in the same.
But thou shalt never know nor learn therein other thing without end. (202.)

' Thus was I learned,' says Julian, ' that Love was our Lord's meaning.'

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LOMBARDI

S. CATHARINE OF SIENA.
From the painting in the Church of S. Domenico, Siena.

S. CATHARINE OF SIENA
1347–1380

BORN and dying within the lifetime of Julian of Norwich, this physically fragile but spiritually magnificent figure emerged from the house of a dyer of Siena to become a national force in her country and her Church. Yet, great as her public work was, the fruitful religion with which she infected thousands of individual souls by the radiant and joyous certitude of her own faith, is the real glory and crown of her life.

In some ways the mantle of S. Hildegard would seem to have fallen on her. After her period of training she emerged so strong and wise that like Hildegard she was recognized as a power both by Church and State; like Hildegard she boldly attacked the evils of her time; like her she had constant bodily suffering which she did not allow to affect her work; like her she was a great letter-writer, and it is in her letters we best come to know her. They were addressed, like Hildegard's, to all sorts of people—popes and kings, lawyers and tailors, noblemen and prisoners, poets, soldiers of fortune, monks, nuns, and little children. Called forth by her intense love of souls, they illustrate the conviction of her life that 'there can be no perfect virtue, none that bears fruit, unless it be exercised by means of our neighbour.'

But Hildegard was an abbess, an aristocrat, an educated woman. Caterina Benincasa belonged to the *popolo minore*; her education consisted of

study of the Scriptures and the primitives of the Siennese School, and she was a tertiary who lived in the world.

As to her background, she was born little over a hundred years after the deaths of S. Dominic and S. Francis, twenty-five years after that of Dante. In the mystic life of Italy she carried on the torch of S. Francis; in its literature and thought, that of Dante. Petrarch and Boccaccio were still living when she was born; Chaucer was a boy of seven. Of the English mediaeval mystics, Richard Rolle died when Catharine was two years old; Walter Hilton and Julian of Norwich were her contemporaries. So was the great Ruysbroeck.

But the echoes of the Franciscan revival were already dying away when Catharine was born; Italy was torn by internal feuds; the Church was governed by pleasure-loving prelates and served by a degenerate clergy, it sought temporal rather than spiritual power. And if here and there a bright flame of spiritual life did spring up from some centre of devotion, those who tended such isolated flames were little inclined to leave their solitudes in order to battle with the corruptions of the official Church.

Catharine was born of simple God-fearing parents in the Fontebranda quarter of Siena, still given up to tanning and dyeing. Coming at the end of a large family—Monna Lapa, the dyer's wife, presented him with twenty-five children—Catharine became the darling of her mother and all the neighbours round. Even as a child she had the characteristic faculty of making those she came in contact with feel their burdens lightened; 'all sadness was excluded from the hearts of those who conversed with her and every mental weariness was driven

out . . . so great a tranquillity of soul took its place that each one, marvelling at himself, rejoiced with a new sort of joy.' [1]

Catharine was a sensitive little girl, never quite at home in this world. ' To such a child in such an age,' says her biographer, ' visions began to come as a matter of course.' She was only six when she saw her first vision. Walking with her brother Stephen down one of the steep streets which led to her home, she saw the heavens open and Christ in glory appear to her, vested in papal robes and seated on a throne. He seemed to smile at her and bless her. That early vision, lying in the secret recesses of her mind, may have suggested her labours for the papacy.

Her parents being themselves devout, the child's passion for religion was allowed to take its course. She fasted and thought out various mortifications for herself. But when she was thirteen, an age at which marriage was then considered suitable in Siena, her father wished to arrange a match for her which was incidentally to improve the family fortunes. Catharine utterly refusing to contemplate this step, a Dominican friar was called in to try and persuade her to it. But he, recognizing that she was obeying a real interior conviction, encouraged her to be true to it. Her family then tried to break her resistance by making her the household drudge, leaving her no time for her devotions. It was then she was driven to make in herself that ' cell of self-knowledge ' to which she could always retreat and

[1] Edmund Gardner, *S. Catharine of Siena*, p. 8. This great book presents the English reader with a history of the saint derived from the original sources : the *Vita*, or *Leggenda Maggiore*, the *Processus*, the *Supplementum*, the *Leggenda Minore*, and the *Letters*.

from which no occupation need drag her away. And she enabled herself to bear the harshness of her family by seeing the Holy Family in them; because of this she 'served them with such gladness and diligence that every one marvelled.' This device she afterwards adopted towards every one with whom she had to deal; it developed into a real seeing of Christ in her neighbour and explains her forbearance and humility.

One day her father happened to come upon her when she was praying; the legend says he saw a white dove hovering over her; at any rate he suddenly realized that her desire for a religious life was not self-will but vocation. She was then allowed to join the Dominican Sisters of Penance, sometimes called the *Mantellate*, because of their habit, 'a white robe of innocence covered by a black mantle of humility.' These religious were bound by no vows and continued living in their own homes. The Order had been instituted for widows; Catharine was the first unmarried member and was only allowed to join because she was not too good-looking!

She was now allowed a room of her own, and, child as she was, she began her life of willed expiation by a three years' retreat in her own room. It is difficult for us to realize the horror of the times in which she lived. Plague and war and famine had left behind them a recklessness which led to all manner of immorality, and Catharine was stricken to the heart by the awful lives she saw around her. There was no self-righteousness in her attitude; she felt that her own sins had contributed to the general downward tendency; that as she had been given grace to recognize the better way, she ought to have been able to help her neighbours to avoid sin. This doctrine developed

in her with the years, but the germ was there from the beginning, when she began in her own room to live that mingled life of austerity and communion with the Divine which her fellow-citizens regarded as supernatural. For three years she only left her room to go to Mass and only spoke when told to do so by her confessor. Hers could not have been a quiet room, for the house, as we can still see, was a small one and the Benincasa family was large and patriarchal in habit ; not only children but grand-children lived under that elastic roof. But Catharine, as her legend tells us, ' found a desert within her own home and solitude in the midst of people.' [1]

She ate only raw herbs and bread and water, and so little of those, that soon her fasts reduced the power of her body to deal with food. Averse, like all the saints, to appearing singular, she used to try to eat but soon food became a torment to her. The strange fact remains that when allowed to fast she was well, while when forced to eat, she suffered acutely. For some years, we are told, she lived on the Blessed Sacrament alone. She slept on a bare board, not even so allowing herself much sleep, though this deprivation was difficult to her. She used the discipline. Yet none of her austerities were undertaken in any morbid or self-cultivating spirit.

' Lord ! give me all the pains and infirmities that there are in the world to bear in my body,' she prayed ; ' I am fain to offer my body in sacrifice and to bear all for the world's sins, that Thou mayst spare it and change its life to another.'

That she was not alone in her horror of existing conditions we see from the fact that Bonaventura, her favourite sister, who had married young, was

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 15.

so appalled by the licentious lives of her husband and his friends, that she faded away and died. In Catharine this horror inspired a life-long desire to offer herself in atonement ; a desire deepened by her constant meditation on the redemptive sacrifice of Christ.

So that she who had been a rosy, healthy child, soon became wasted and transparent. Whatever we may think of the rightness of such a course, the fact remains that throughout the ages some souls have felt this call to vicarious sacrifice. Pain was for Catharine a creative, almost a utilitarian thing ; not an evil but a means to good. She had ' victory over all things that befell her. As often as any new thing falleth to a man,' she said, ' be it of prosperity or adversity, he should think in himself thus : *Of this I will win somewhat!'* She had chosen pain for her refreshing.[1] Her prayer also was of this kind and her interest in others did not fall short of taking their sins upon herself and doing penance for them.

Her only recreations seem to have been reading—and that only the Psalms and Offices of the Church—and weaving flowers together into wreaths and crosses, singing to herself the while ; these she used to send in greeting to the friends she did not allow herself to see.

In these three secluded years, protected from the distractions of the outside world if not from the uproar of her family, she underwent the training for her life's work. She consciously oriented all her thoughts and instincts towards that Divine Being for whose service she was fitting herself. And she received, like Julian of Norwich, many revelations of Divine Love. She was shown the

[1] *Cell of Self-Knowledge.* ' Divers Doctrines . . . taken out of the Life of . . . Saint Katherin of Seenes,' p. 44.

foundation of all knowledge when the Divine Voice said to her :

> Knowest thou, O daughter, who thou art and who I am ? Thou art she who art not, and I am He who am. If thou hast this knowledge within thy soul, the enemy will never be able to deceive thee . . . never wilt thou consent to do anything against My commandments, and every grace, every truth, every clearness, thou wilt acquire without difficulty.[1]

Reflecting on this, Catharine saw that of herself she had no being but depended in everything on the Creator ; that Christ, through His Blood, had restored to man the life of grace which had been destroyed by the Fall ; that He had done this through love which man had done nothing to deserve. She saw further that even after receiving this grace in baptism, she had sinned—she was overwhelmed by the goodness of God that even in spite of this He had not commanded the earth to swallow her up. This gave rise in her to such hatred of self that she desired nothing of her own will but everything in accordance with the will of God. She was glad of every pain and sorrow both because they came to her through God and because they punished her sins. She was thus able to use all kinds of suffering ; writing towards the end of her life about physical pain, she said :

> It does not afflict my body but even fortifies it ; so that, instead of receiving torment, albeit I feel it, it brings me strength.

Self-love and self-will were to Catharine the cause of all evil in spiritual as in temporal things. She criticizes those who want to choose their own ladder of perfection instead of patiently mounting the rungs of the ladder God sets before them ; who regard self-chosen penance as an end in itself and not merely as a means ; who fall into despair when

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 16.

deprived of spiritual consolations. Desolation is to be thought of as a discipline, a medicine rather than a punishment.

But alongside of this sane and modern conception of life, she suffered many assaults from the Evil One, that terror of the Middle Ages. Asking for strength to withstand such visitations, Christ answered her that if she would acquire the virtue of fortitude, she must imitate Him. She must remember that though He could have overcome the enemy by supernatural means, He chose the Cross to teach man by deed as well as by word. If, then, Catharine wished to become strong, she must accept the Cross as He had done, and not only endure pain but embrace it. The more she suffered for Christ, the more like Him she would become. She was therefore to receive the sweet as bitter and the bitter as sweet and be strong in all things.

But her torments grew ; fiends assailed her and impure thoughts distracted her till, in despair, she cried out, ' I have chosen suffering for my consolation and gladly bear these and all other torments in the Name of the Saviour ! ' Then her assailants fled and Christ Himself appeared to her on the Cross, wounded and bloodstained. ' My daughter Catharine,' He said, ' seest thou how much I have suffered for thee ? Let it not be hard to thee to endure for Me.' But, shaken by her struggles, she reproached Him, ' Where wast Thou, my Lord, whilst my heart was tormented with such foulness ? ' And He answered, ' I was in thy heart. Thou, My daughter, who with My virtue and not with thine own hast so faithfully battled and hast merited still greater favour from Me . . . henceforth I will reveal Myself to thee more often and in more familiar wise.' [1]

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 21.

This may sound extravagant to modern ears. But Catharine was a spiritual genius; she was undergoing a period of intense training. The fact that she emerged from it calm and strong, able to play a wise and decisive part in the problems of Church and State, proves that her training had developed and enriched her being, not over-strained or misguided it. The supernatural was the Real to her; her intense awareness of the Divine, achieved through utter self-giving and willed attention to God, was rewarded by many such visions. They all urged her to greater and more selfless effort for others. 'Inwardly abiding in unbroken repose,' she exercised outwardly, as Ruysbroeck was to express it, 'a widespreading love to all in common.'

The end of these three years of growth and expansion was crowned by what is known as her Mystical Marriage. In this vision Christ put a ring on her finger with the words:

> Lo! I espouse thee to Myself, the Creator and Saviour, in the Faith, which, until thou celebratest thy eternal nuptials with Me in heaven, thou wilt preserve ever without stain. Henceforth do manfully, My daughter, and without hesitation, those things which . . . will be put into thy hands, for now being armed with the fortitude of the Faith, thou wilt happily overcome all thine adversaries.

Though the vision faded Catharine always saw that ring on her finger. She was then commanded to open her treasury of divine grace and knowledge for the honour of Christ and pour it out before the faithful. The grain she had harvested in her three quiet years was now to be made into bread for the hungry world.

Emerging from her cell, she began to work amongst the poor. It was a radiant personality who went in and out among them. Though thin

and worn and in constant pain, her high spirits overflowed, so that she brought not only joy but mirth to the houses she visited. 'She was always jocund and of a happy spirit and especially when held down by illness; while that lasted she was ever laughing in the Lord, exultant and rejoicing.'[1] Conscious of being the bride of the King of Heaven, she saw her Bridegroom in the often querulous people she nursed. Specially sensitive to anything unclean, she forced herself with terrible thoroughness to overcome her instinctive shrinking from wounds and disease.

But some of her fellow citizens disapproved of her extreme devotion. They even objected to her remaining so long in adoration after receiving Holy Communion. That Sacrament was to her so wondrous a thing that it took her spirit quite away and left her 'rapt in ecstasy'; it was so much the strength of her life that her very existence seemed to depend on it. She communicated daily, a thing unusual for her time; that also was criticized for, already hailed as the saint of the people, the *Beata Popolana*, everything she did was subjected to the usual criticism of small towns. She took it all humbly, saying she was sure it was meant for her good. Once when charged with some more serious sin, she asked Christ to prove her innocence. He appeared to her and offered her either a crown of pearls or a crown of thorns. Ashamed of her weakness, Catharine seized the crown of thorns and crushed it down on her brows.

She always tried to conform to ordinary standards. To a religious of Florence who doubted her ascetic practices she wrote a letter in which, considering her penetrating knowledge of human nature, we may be allowed to wonder whether she

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 48.

is not indulging in gentle satire. She begins this letter, as she began all her letters, with an invocation :

In the Name of Jesus Christ crucified
and of sweet Mary :

Dearest and most beloved father in Christ sweet Jesus : I, Catharine, a useless servant of Jesus Christ, commend me to you : with the desire to see us united and transformed in that sweet, eternal, and pure Truth which destroys in us all falsity and lying. I thank you cordially, dearest father, for the holy zeal and jealousy which you have toward my soul : in that you are apparently very anxious over what you hear of my life. . . .

I am certain that nothing affects you except desire for the honour of God and for my salvation which makes you fear the assaults and illusions of devils. As to your special fear, father, concerning my behaviour about eating, I am not surprised ; for I assure you, that not only do you fear, but I myself tremble, for fear of devilish wiles. . . . You sent me word to pray to God particularly that I might eat. I tell you, father, and I say it in the sight of God, that in all ways within my power I have always forced myself once or twice a day to take food. And I have prayed constantly, and do pray God and shall pray Him, that in this matter of eating He will give me grace to live like other creatures, if it be His will—for it is mine. . . . I beg you that if you see any remedy you will write me of it ; and provided it be for the honour of God, I will accept it willingly. Also I beg you not to be light in judging, if you are not clearly illumined in the sight of God. I say no more to you. Remain in the holy and sweet grace of God. Sweet Jesus, Jesus Love.[1]

By this time a group of disciples had gathered round her ; her father allowed them to meet in her room, which thus became a centre of life. Among her early disciples were Alessa dei Saracini, a young widow of noble birth, and Cecca Gori, both educated women belonging to the *Mantellate*. These two used to write Catharine's letters for her,

[1] Scudder, *S. Catharine of Siena as seen in her Letters*, p. 77.

as she herself did not learn to write till three years before her death. As to her men disciples, Fra Bartolommeo, a Dominican friar, tells us how her attraction for them had nothing feminine about it; it was rather that 'her aspect and address seemed to pour forth a certain fragrance of purity, more angelical than human, and withal she was always joyful and of merry countenance.' Her intellectual power appealed to them too, her sympathy and comradeship. She identified herself with her spiritual children, this girl of twenty whom they called their Holy Mother. She had a light touch in her dealings with them; if they got too intense she coaxed them back into balance and sanity. Look for instance at her letter to a young monk whose despair had led him to contemplate suicide:

> We have all had a great desire to hear news of you. It seems to me that the demon has not slept and is not sleeping with regard to you; at which I am very glad, because I see that, by the goodness of God, the battle has not been to death, but to life. Thanks, thanks to the sweet God eternal who has given us so much grace! Now you will begin to know that you are nothing and to realize that your being, and all grace that is founded upon your being, comes from Him who is. To Him let all thanks and praise be rendered; for it is His will that we give the flower to Him and that the fruit be our own.[1]

It was an extraordinary situation: this daughter of the people directing a band of disciples drawn from all classes, nobility and clergy, scholars and artisans, and not only people of reputable life. The prisons knew Catharine as well as the hospitals; there too she took the sins of others upon her; she made them know she was their friend and by her cheerful shouldering of their burdens brought light to the dark hopelessness of their lives.

She had a strange power of divining the secret

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 136.

thoughts of her little family ; Bartolommeo asked her one day how she did this :

'O son,' she replied, 'since it has pleased our Sweet Saviour to give me the sons and daughters which by His gift I have, nothing concerning you is hidden from me.'

She was able to pull them back by invisible bonds when they went astray ; she felt that since Christ by His example and teaching had 'enkindled the hearts of men to the contempt of their earthly lives, and to the ceasing from sin,' so she too, endowed with such wondrous gifts, should have been able to do likewise. That was why, seeing evil all around her, she considered herself the cause of it ; why she considered herself the cause of the sufferings her neighbours must endure ; why she felt herself impelled to do penance for them.

In 1368 Catharine's father died, and shortly afterwards revolution broke out in Siena. Bands of armed men paraded the streets and there was bloodshed and rioting on all hands ; yet though the citizens were afraid to venture out, when Catharine passed along the combatants saluted her and lowered their arms. The Benincasa family lost much money ; the brothers had to leave Siena for Florence and Catharine seems from that time to have been left in charge of her mother, whom she vainly tried to reconcile to the increasing public demands on herself.

Even while devoting herself to philanthropic work, Catharine was 'rapt and illumined and strengthened by God' in a way she said could not be expressed in words. Praying passionately one day for a new heart, she saw Christ, in a vision, take her heart from her side and replace it by His own. She exclaimed to her confessor after this :

Do you not see that I am no longer she who was, but am changed into another person ? Such gladness and such delight

possess my mind that I marvel how my soul can stay in my body. Such ardour is in my soul that fire seems cold in comparison ! [1]

Following this she fell into a trance in which she believed she had died and that her soul had tasted eternity. She would feign have stayed, but her Lord said to her :

The salvation of many souls demands thy return, nor shalt thou any more keep that way of life that thou hast hitherto kept, nor shalt thou henceforth have thy cell for habitation ; nay, thou shalt have to go forth from thine own city for the welfare of souls. I shall be always with thee and shall guide thee and bring thee back ; thou shalt bear the honour of My Name and witness in spiritual things before small and great, the laity no less than the clergy and religious ; for I shall give thee speech and wisdom which none will be able to withstand. I shall lead thee too before pontiffs and rulers of the Churches and of the Christian people, in order that, as is My wont, by means of the weak I may confound the pride of the strong. [2]

This was the spirit in which Catharine entered on her public work. It was recognized that she possessed spiritual power ; her prayers effected strange conversions, not only of peaceful women but of proud aristocrats and hardened sinners who, we read, were changed from ' wolves into lambs.' In a different category were those young nobles who came to her and, binding themselves to her service, acted as her secretaries while she lived and after her death respected her wishes by entering religious Orders. The first of these was Neri di Landoccio, a poet of birth and education who brought many of his friends to Catharine. Knowing the ways of the world, he was useful to her as an ambassador, being sent once to Avignon to announce her coming to the Pope and later to the Queen of Naples. The second of her secretaries,

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 82. [2] ibid., p. 83.

Stefano Maconi, became her favourite son and one of the most important members of the 'family.' He was a gay, irresponsible youth, yet Catharine saw vocation in his eager spirit. That was not at first clear to himself, though he was amazed at her insight and exclaimed the first time he spoke with her, 'The finger of God is here!' After her death he became a Carthusian monk and rose to be General of his Order.

It was to the third, Francesco Malavolti, who once lapsed into an irregular life in her absence and was then afraid to face her again, that she wrote 'with desire of finding her little lost sheep back in the fold with his companions.'

> Come, come, dearest son! I can well call thee dear, so much art thou costing me in tears and labour and in much bitter sorrow. Ah! come my sweet son, and return to thy fold!

Going to her, he was received with 'joyful countenance'; and when some of Catharine's friends said to her that Francesco lacked stability she answered with a smile:

> Never mind, my sisters; he cannot escape out of my hands let him go by what way he will; for when he thinks I am far from him I shall put such a yoke upon his neck that he will never be able to slip out of it!

It was Francesco who left us the following graphic account of Catharine dictating letters to her three secretaries simultaneously; one to Pope Gregory, one to Bernabo Visconti, the third to 'a certain great nobleman.'

> She dictates now to one, now to another; at times with her face covered by her hands or her veil, as though absorbed in thought, at other times with clasped hands and head raised up to heaven; at intervals she seems wrapt in ecstasy, but, nevertheless, goes on continuously speaking. Then, suddenly, all three stop writing, look puzzled, and appeal to her for aid.

They have all taken down the same sentence but for which of them was it meant? Catharine smilingly assures them that there is no cause for concern: 'Dearest sons, do not trouble, for you have done this by the work of the Holy Spirit; when the letters are finished, we shall see how these words fit in with our intention and then arrange what had best be done.' [1]

Another of Catharine's chief disciples was William Flete, an Englishman and graduate of Cambridge, who lived as a hermit in the woods of Lecceto. Catharine thought he laid too much stress on his austerities, and wrote to him:

Those who feed at the table of holy desire have more zeal for slaying their self-will than for slaying their bodies; *that* they have also done, but not as their chief aim, for the chief aim ought ever to be to slay the will, that it may seek nothing but to follow Christ, seeking the honour and glory of His Name and the salvation of souls. . . .

Such men abide ever in peace and quiet; there are none who can offend them because they have cast away the thing that gives offence, self-will. All the persecutions which the world and the devil can inflict run away beneath their feet. . . . Such a man as this rejoices in everything; he does not make himself a judge of the servants of God . . . nay, he rejoices in every condition and every type that he sees, saying, 'Thanks be to Thee, eternal Father, that Thou hast many mansions in Thy House.' . . . And even as to a thing which he may expressly see to be sin, he does not pose as a judge but regards it rather with holy, true compassion, saying, 'To-day it is thy turn and to-morrow mine, unless it be for divine grace which preserves me.' [2]

Catharine was now to be swept into the troubled stream of civil and ecclesiastical politics. She was a devoted daughter of the Church, for the Church was to her the Body, the Pope the heir, of Christ. She felt herself bound to support Church and Pope, whatever their earthly form, because of the heavenly tradition they represented.

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 372.
[2] Scudder, *Letters of S. Catharine of Siena*, p. 64.

Her ideal was a reformed Church, a papacy restored to Rome as a spiritual power which in Christ-like humility and love should embrace and unite the world. She saw a new Italy, peaceful and united, ruled by a restored and purified papacy.

The actual papacy of her day, seeking temporal power and employing mercenaries to fight its battles, was utterly repugnant to her. Yet when the Tuscan cities, headed by Florence, rebelled against the rule of the Pope, because it was a foreign rule—the papal seat having been for over a century in ' Babylonian captivity ' at Avignon, the Pope a Frenchman living under the protection of the French king—Catharine ranged herself on the side of the papacy, though no one saw its faults better than she did or grieved more bitterly over them. Petrarch and S. Bridget of Sweden had already done their utmost to persuade the Pope to restore the papacy to Rome and to reform the Church. They had laboured in vain and when they died within a year of each other, Caterina Benincasa took up their work.

It was in 1374 that she began her public life, being then asked to attend a Chapter of Friars Preachers in Florence. She was now twenty-seven and ' deemed a great servant of God.' Her disciples, the poor she worked among, the rulers of cities and of the Church, all recognized that this fragile young woman had a supernatural force within her. Arduous as her visible labours were, they were nothing compared to her ' wrestlings ' in prayer for the souls and causes she felt it her duty to work for. Prayer for Catharine was definitely something to be done, there was no idle pleasure about it ; it was rather a willed self-giving for the sins of the world in a way our wisest and most saintly modern teachers have also recognized

and advocated. One of her secretaries wrote of Catharine :

> I think you know that her prayers are of such intensity that one hour of prayer more consumed that poor little body than two days upon the rack would have done another.[1]

When Catharine got back to Siena she found it in the grip of the plague. Whole families were wiped out ; the death carts made daily rounds to collect the dead. Catharine threw herself heart and soul into the nursing and comforting of the sick. However black their lives might have been she would say to them :

> Fear not, I have taken thy sins upon myself. I will do penance for them and make satisfaction for them instead of thee. But I wish for this grace for thee ; that thou confess thy sins.

No difficult demands, merely an assurance that their sins were removed from them and would be atoned for. In the Mirror of the Holy Catharine was to them, they saw no angry God but a Father who was sorry for them and sent them this angel of healing.

The Benincasa household did not escape. Two brothers and a sister died and eight little children, Catharine's nephews and nieces. There is a moving picture of Catharine preparing their little bodies for the grave, saying over each, ' This one at least I shall not lose ! '

It was during this outbreak that she first met Fra Raimondo of Capua, who became her director and chief spiritual friend and who wrote her life. He and many other Dominicans were also working day and night among the sick and dying ; many of them too gave their lives. One young Dominican joined Catharine's spiritual family at this time.

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 333.

'Oh, how gladly did I see her!' he exclaimed; 'how eagerly did I listen to her burning words! Verily for her sake all labour was turned to me for rest!'

It was probably through Raimondo, who was a learned man, and her other Dominican friends, that Catharine derived the theology we find in her teaching. Yet Raimondo was often unable to follow her. Though he was her director, they were really rather fellow-travellers; he learnt more from Catharine than she from him. She sometimes got impatient with him as we see from a story he tells against himself. She was discoursing at great length on matters above him and he, poor man, fell asleep. Too engrossed to notice, Catharine was annoyed when she discovered what had happened. She woke him with a loud voice, 'Why ah! why do you lose your soul's profit by sleeping?' she exclaimed. 'Am I talking about God to a wall or to you?'

Other districts now claimed her. In 1375 she set out for Pisa to urge that city to refrain from joining the anti-Papal League. She travelled with a large party—her mother, several women disciples, and her secretaries. Fra Raimondo and two other priests also went with her to hear the confessions of the converts she made. She was received with reverence, a house was put at her disposal, and soon the usual busy life of interviews, letters, public affairs, was in full swing. Her words were said to be so potent and fiery that they turned her hearers from 'vessels of contumely into vessels of crystal.' But the reverence paid her aroused jealousy and talk. When Catharine was asked why she did not put a stop to it she answered simply:

I hardly notice what they do and by God's grace it does not please me. I consider only the affection that brings them to

me and thank the Divine Goodness that thus moves them, praying that He may perfect and fulfil the desires He has inspired.[1]

Catharine meditated constantly, as we see from her *Dialogue* and her *Letters*, on the Passion. Students of the Siennese primitives will recognize how richly her mind was stored with their conceptions. They probably decided the form of many of her visions ; yet the profound conviction that the Passion of Christ alone had unlocked the gates of heaven was as strong in her as in Mechthild. She meditated constantly with mixed awe and exultation on the Love that had thus given itself for her. She longed to be 'nailed and fastened to the tree of the most holy Cross of Christ, crucified with Him through love and deep humility.' And at Pisa, in an ecstasy after Holy Communion, she had a vision which was the outcome and fulfilment of her desire. It was after the celebration ; Catharine was prostrate on the ground. She was seen to rise to her knees and, stretching out her arms, her face irradiated, to remain thus for a few moments. Then she fell unconscious to the ground. She described afterwards what had happened to her.

I saw the crucified Lord coming down to me in a great light, and for this, by the impetus of the mind that would fain go forth to meet its Creator, the body was constrained to rise. Then from the marks of His most sacred wounds, I saw five blood-red rays coming down upon me, which were directed towards the hands and feet and heart of my body. Wherefore, perceiving the mystery I straightway exclaimed : *Ah, Lord my God, I beseech Thee, let not the marks appear outwardly on my body!* Then while I was yet speaking, before the rays reached me, they changed their blood-red colour to splendour and in the semblance of pure light they came to the five places in my body. . . . So great is the pain that I endure sensibly in all those five places but especially within my heart, that,

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 130.

unless the Lord works a new miracle, it seems not possible to me that the life of my body can stay with such agony and that it will not end in a few days.[1]

Her friends took her home. They thought she was dying, but in answer to the prayers of her family, her strength was 'supernaturally renewed.' From that time Catharine knew in the depths of her soul that she was to offer herself as a sacrifice for the Church.

It was while at Pisa that she saw the sea for the first time, making a voyage by boat to the Island of Gorgona, an experience which may have suggested those images of the *Sea Pacific* and the *Barque of the Divine Mercy* which we find in her writings. From Pisa she sent out fiery letters in all directions in support of the papacy; urging that all must rally to this cause and 'plant the tree of the Cross in the garden of the soul.' One of these letters was to Sir John Hawkwood, that soldier of fortune who commanded the Pope's mercenaries. She had urged him before to quit this ignoble service and go to the Crusades, and now she writes:

My soul desires that you should change your way of life and take the pay and Cross of Christ crucified, you and all your companions; so that you may be Christ's company to march against the infidels who possess our Holy Place . . . thus will you show that you are a true and manly knight.[2]

When Gregory retaliated against the anti-Papal League by placing Florence under an interdict, Catharine knew he was making a mistake, not attacking the evil at its root. She wrote to him, and although her letter is brave and outspoken it is expressed with much delicacy and a wealth of imagery to sugar the pill.

She writes of a weak prelate who lacks self-

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 134. [2] Scudder, *Letters*, p. 102.

knowledge ; who, in order to spare himself unpleasantness and avoid offending his friends, neglects holy justice ; who, when a wound needs to be cauterized, treats it with ointment which not only fails to heal, but infects everything and may lead to death.

Oh me, oh me, sweetest Babbo mine ! . . . Why does the shepherd go on using so much ointment ? . . . Blind is the shepherd-physician who has regard to nothing but pleasing and his own advantage—since, not to forfeit it, he refrains from using the knife of justice. If up to this time we have not stood very firm, I wish and pray in truth that the time which remains may be dealt with manfully, following Christ whose vicar you are, like a strong man. . . . Have a care for spiritual things alone, for good shepherds, good rulers in your cities, since on account of bad shepherds and rulers you have encountered rebellion. . . . Up then, father, and no more negligence. [1]

In a later letter, urging the reform of the Church and the using of his mercenaries for a Crusade, she concludes with a passionate appeal for the return of the papacy to Rome.

Answer the summons of God who calls you to hold and to possess the seat of the glorious Shepherd S. Peter whose vicar you have been. . . . Come and you will reform the Church, giving her good priests. Fill her heart with the ardent love she has lost ; for she has been so drained of blood by the iniquitous men who have devoured her, that she has become pallid. But take heart and come, father, and do not make the servants of God wait, who are afflicted with desire. I, poor miserable woman, can wait no more ; living, I seem to die in my pain, seeing God thus outraged. Do not postpone the peace because of what has happened . . . but come ! I tell you that the fierce wolves will lay their heads in your lap like meek lambs and crave you to pardon them. I say no more. I beg you, father, to hear and listen to what Fra Raimondo will tell you, and the other sons who are with him, who come in the Name of Christ crucified and of myself ; for they are the true servants of God and sons of Holy Church.[2]

[1] Scudder, *Letters*, pp. 119 sqq.
[2] Op. cit., p. 132 ; Gardner, op. cit., p. 162.

Not long after this Catharine had a vision in which Christ laid the Cross upon her neck and put an olive-branch in her hand. In response to it she offered to mediate between the Republic of Florence and the Pope. The Republic, feeling that 'peace could never be brought about save by the hands of the servants of God,' accepted her offer and she set out for Avignon with her usual retinue of friends, priests, and secretaries. Two days after her arrival she was received in private audience. But as Gregory knew no Italian and Catharine neither Latin nor French, Raimondo was present to act as interpreter. A timid, vacillating character, Gregory had withstood her letters. He was a Frenchman; going to Italy, a foreign country, appealed neither to him nor to his French Cardinals. But he was troubled about it, and when Catharine, that wasted but valiant figure, stood before him, her ardour infected him. 'In order that thou mayst see clearly that I desire peace,' he said, 'I put the matter entirely into thy hands. Only be careful for the honour of the Church.'

Gregory came to rely on Catharine. When he asked her advice one day and she replied it was not fitting for a poor little woman to advise the Sovereign Pontiff, he exclaimed, 'I do not ask for advice but that thou tell me the will of God in this matter!' He too regarded her as the mouthpiece of the 'Truth,' a word she often used when speaking of Christ. But Gregory's Cardinals tried to dissuade him from leaving Avignon; they prophesied disaster on the voyage and he asked Catharine to pray God to send him light as to what he should do. Asking that all servile fear should be removed from him, she offered herself for the accomplishment of his enterprise in a prayer

taken down at the time by one of the papal officials who afterwards became her disciple :

O supreme and ineffable Deity, I have sinned and am not worthy to pray to Thee, but Thou hast power to make me worthy ; punish my sins, O Lord, and consider not my miseries. I have one body, which I offer up to Thee ; here is my flesh, here is my blood ; let my veins be emptied, my body destroyed, my bones scattered, for those for whom I pray to Thee ; if it is Thy will, let all my frame be ground up for Thy vicar upon earth, the bridegroom of Thy Spouse, for whom I pray Thee to deign to hear me, that he, Thy vicar, may consider Thy will, may love and fulfil it, so that we may not perish. Give him a new heart, that he may continually grow in grace, strong to uplift the banner of holy Cross.[1]

Finally on September 13, 1376, Gregory set sail from Marseilles, Catharine going overland to Genoa. When he arrived there, upset by a stormy voyage, he was met by rumours of trouble in Rome and his Cardinals urged him even yet to turn back. Afraid to see Catharine openly because of their opposition, he went secretly to the house where she was staying. She fell on her knees before him, but he bade her rise, saying it was he who had come to ask favours. When he left he was filled with new courage, and telling his Cardinals he was going on to Rome, he put to sea. After many delays he triumphally entered Rome on January 17, 1377.

Though one of the great issues for which Catharine had worked was thus fulfilled, Gregory's return to Rome did not lead to the reform of the Church. And though his successor, Urban VI, did attempt reform, his unwise efforts led to the schism, thus dividing still further the Church Catharine had given herself to unite. It was the tragedy of her life that her actual achievements yielded no evident spiritual fruit. Yet she knew her ideal to be right ; she was true to her heavenly vision however imper-

[1] Gardner, op. cit., p. 188.

fect its earthly form ; the Church was to her the Body of Christ, not the soul. And the Divine Voice urged her to offer herself for the reform of that Body.

Sweetest my daughter, thou seest how she has soiled her face with impurity and self-love and become swollen by the pride and avarice of those who feed at her bosom. But take thy tears and sweat, drawing them from the fountain of My divine charity, and cleanse her face. For I promise thee, that her beauty shall not be restored to her by the sword, nor by cruelty or war, but by peace, and humble continual prayers, tears and sweats, poured forth from the grieving desire of My servants.[1]

When eventually Catharine was free to return to Siena, it was to the accompaniment of strife and bloodshed, culminating in the massacre of Cesena. Human life was of no account ; men and women were put to death for trifling offences ; foolish words were punished by the headsman's sword. Catharine spent much of her time visiting the prisons, comforting those about to die. It was thus the famous incident occurred which Swinburne describes in his *Songs of Sunrise*. Niccolo di Toldo, a young Perugian noble, was condemned to death for criticizing the government of Siena. Terrified, rebellious, refusing to believe that he was really to be put to death because of a few hasty words, he was beside himself when Catharine went to him. She describes what happened in the following famous letter to Raimondo :

Up, up, sweetest my father ! and sleep no more ! For I hear such news that I wish no more bed of repose or worldly state. I have just received a Head in my hands, which was to me of such sweetness as heart cannot think, nor tongue say, nor eye see, nor the ears hear. . . . I went to see him whom you know ; whence he received such comfort and consolation that he confessed and prepared himself very well. And he

[1] Scudder, *Letters*, p. 338.

made me promise by the love of God that when the time of the sentence should come, I would be with him. So I promised and did. Then in the morning before the bell rang, I went to him ; and he received great consolation. I led him to hear Mass and he received Holy Communion which he had never before received. His will was accorded and submitted to the will of God ; and only one fear was left, that of not being strong at the moment. But the measureless and glowing goodness of God deceived him, creating in him such affection and love in the desire of God that he did not know how to abide without Him and said : ' Stay with me and do not abandon me. So it shall not be otherwise well with me. And I die content.' And he held his head upon my breast. . . . And desire waxing in my soul, feeling his fear, I said : ' Comfort thee, sweet my brother ; since we shall soon arrive at the Wedding Feast. Thou shalt go there bathed in the sweet Blood of the Son of God, with the sweet Name of Jesus which I will never to leave thy memory.' . . . Now think, father and son, his heart then lost all fear and his face changed from sorrow to gladness, and he rejoiced and exulted and said : 'Whence comes such grace to me ? ' And he said words so sweet as to break one's heart, of the goodness of God. . . . I waited for him then at the place of justice. . . . Then he came like a gentle lamb ; and seeing me he began to smile and wanted me to make the sign of the Cross. When he had received the sign, I said : ' Down ! To the Bridal sweetest brother ! For soon shalt thou be in the enduring life.' He prostrated him with great gentleness and I stretched out his neck ; and he bowed me down and recalled to him the Blood of the Lamb. His lips said naught save *Jesus* ! and *Catharine.* ! And so saying I received his head in my hands. . . . Then was seen God-and-Man, as might the clearness of the sun be seen. . . . When He had received his blood and his desire, He received also his soul which He put in the open treasure house of His side, full of mercy. . . . With what sweetness and love He awaited that soul departed from the body. . . .[1]

Thus was a cruel and meaningless death lifted by Catharine into the atmosphere of eternity.

For the next months she was occupied in the country round Siena, pacifying hostile barons and speaking to the multitudes who flocked to hear

[1] Scudder, *Letters*, p. 114.

her wherever she went. Fra Raimondo recorded that he had sometimes seen 'a thousand or more men and women come down from the mountains to hear Catharine, drawn as if by an invisible trumpet; not only her words but the very sight of her moved them to compunction for their sins . . . a great abundance of grace descended from heaven into their hearts.'

Catharine was firmly convinced, as she wrote to her mother, that she had been placed on earth for naught else but the honour of God and the salvation of souls, and to her little family, chafing under criticism of themselves and their 'holy Mother,' she wrote:

> We are put to sow the word of God and to gather fruit of souls. Every one is bound to be keen for his own art; this is the art that God has given us; we must, therefore, exercise it and not bury our talent, for then we should be worthy of a great rebuke, but employ it at every time and in every place and on every creature. For God is no respecter of places or of creatures but accepts holy and true desires. I came for naught else save to eat and taste souls and draw them from the hands of the devils. For this I would lay down my life if I had a thousand and for this reason I shall go and stay according as the Holy Spirit shall direct.[1]

She now felt obliged, much to her sorrow, to part from Raimondo, sending him to the Pope with certain proposals which Gregory evidently did not act upon. His intercourse with Catharine had ceased after they parted at Genoa; his mistaken policy had led him into grave difficulties with the Tuscan cities, difficulties from which he seemed to think Catharine should have extricated him instead of working among the Siennese peasantry. But in the spring of 1378 he asked her to go to Florence to work for peace. She had hardly

[1] Gardner, op. cit., pp. 214, 217.

arrived there when news reached her of Gregory's death.

Ten days later Urban VI was elected. Catharine had met him at Avignon. He was a man of harsh nature, aware of the need for reform but acting with such unwise severity that one of Catharine's friends could write of him, ' It seems that our new Christ on earth is a terrible man ! ' Catharine sent him a letter urging him ' manfully to correct wickedness like a just Shepherd, to be gentle and conciliatory, to win his sons with benignity, with as much use of the rod as they were fit to bear, but no more.' She concludes :

> I will labour till I die, in prayer and whatever way I can for the honour of God and for your peace and that of your sons.

Under Urban's rule, peace between Florence and the Holy See was at last concluded, and Catharine's second great public work accomplished. In these months of rioting and bloodshed in Florence she all but achieved a longed-for martyrdom at the hands of the anti-Papal Party. She writes in bitter disappointment :

> How blessed my soul would have been if for the most sweet Spouse . . . and for the salvation of souls I had given my blood !

News of the election of the anti-Pope Clement VII reached her in Siena where she had gone thankfully back to her ' daily way divine.' The schism filled her with sorrow ; she thought the dissension in the Church could only be cured by ' vigils, tears, sweat, mournful and loving desires, humble, continuant prayer.' But for the three precious months she was now to be allowed to spend in peace in her own home, she put aside the turmoil in Church and State to dictate to her secretaries what is known as her *Divine Dialogue*.

Giving herself up to the divine matters of which it treats, Catharine was 'rapt out of her corporeal senses,' into a state of profound recollection similar to that in which *Revelations of Divine Love* had been made to Julian of Norwich five years earlier. Catharine's *Dialogue* between God and the soul gathers up the doctrine we find scattered through her life and her letters. It is a practical book dealing with the whole spiritual life and written for ordinary people, though its literary form is such that it is regarded as 'one of the classics of the age and land which produced Petrarch and Boccaccio.'[1] As a guide to the spiritual life it is full of wisdom and teaching for our own day.

Convinced that no virtue could be fruitful unless exercised by means of our neighbour, Catharine was also convinced that no soul could be of use to its neighbour unless it first acquired virtue. The method of acquiring it is the subject of her book. It abounds in metaphors, of which one of the most striking is that of Christ as the Bridge from Time to Eternity. The road to heaven was broken down by the Fall; 'wherefore,' said the Divine Voice,' I have made a Bridge of My only-begotten Son. . . . But it is not enough that My Son should have made you this bridge unless you walk thereon.'

The soul must make some effort of itself; it must mount the three steps which lead to the crown of the Bridge. And it mounts them through Love, 'for Love carries the soul as the feet carry the body.' On the first step the soul strips itself of vice; on the second it fills itself with love and virtue; on the third it tastes peace. And on the

[1] *Dialogue* translated by Algar Thorold. Introduction, p. 16.

crown of the Bridge stands a hostelry where food is given to the traveller :

This hostelry is Holy Church which ministers the Bread of Life and gives to drink of the Blood, so that My creatures journeying on their pilgrimage may not faint by the way.

After trimming Discretion (the lamp of the spiritual life), slaying the will, persevering in prayer, and willingly enduring suffering, the soul achieves a state in which self-will is overcome. Self-hatred, that ' nurse and nourisher of Love,' takes its place, and then self-loss, for the more it loses itself, the more it finds God.

These souls, thrown into the furnace of My charity . . . are like a brand wholly consumed in the furnace. . . . They are made one with Me through grace. . . . From these perfect ones I never withdraw My sentiment. . . . Being yet mortal, they taste the good of the immortals ; having yet the weight of the body, they receive the joy of the spirit.[1]

The virtue of obedience is the key which unlocks the gates of heaven. The hideous garment of mortal sin being gradually stripped off by confession, contrition, and desire of amendment, the soul, clad in a shining nuptial robe, clasping the key of obedience to its breast, hastens to open the gate.

If a man does not unlock the gate of heaven in the light of faith with the hand of love by means of this key, he never will enter there in spite of its having been opened by the Word ; for though I created you without yourselves, I will not save you without yourselves.[2]

Whatever the givenness of grace, the soul must make some effort of itself ; it must fashion itself a girdle of the love-of-pleasing-God, and to this girdle it must tie the key of obedience with the cord of detachment.

Catharine's fundamental doctrine is that man, whether in the cloister or in the world, must enter

[1] *Dialogue*, lxxviii, lxxix. [2] *Dialogue*, cxxxvi.

and abide in the cell of self-knowledge. The watch-dog Conscience guards the door to give the alarm in case of danger. Within his cell man comes to know himself and to know God, a knowledge ever deepening, ever new.

'Thou dost see this sweet and loving Word,' said the Divine Voice, 'born in a stable while Mary was journeying, to show you who are travelling that you must ever be born again in the stable of knowledge of yourselves, where you will find Me born by grace within your souls.'

The *Dialogue* ends in a paean of gratitude and exaltation:

Thou eternal Trinity, art a sea so deep that the more I enter the more I find and the more I find the more I seek of Thee. Thou art the food that never satiates, for when the soul is satiated in Thine abyss, it is not satiated but ever continues to hunger and thirst after Thee.

The Light of Faith is as a Mirror as Thou, Eternal Trinity, dost make me know; for gazing into this mirror, holding it with the hand of love, it shows me myself in Thee who am Thy creature and Thee in me by the union which Thou didst make of Thy Godhead with our humanity.[1]

Catharine had just finished the dictation of her *Dialogue* when she was summoned by Urban VI to Rome. She arrived there 'in much peace'; Urban welcomed her and she addressed him and his Cardinals, putting everything on the highest level, urging them to have faith in God. It is a strange picture, Catharine, suffering but radiant, pleading for the great truths before the princes of the visible Church. Urban was infected by her ardour. 'This poor little woman puts us to shame by her courage!' he exclaimed, and he entrusted her with the writing of letters to kings and rulers and prelates inclined to favour the anti-Pope and his party.

[1] *Dialogue*, cxlviii.

It was a blow to Catharine that Fra Raimondo was sent on an embassy to France ; it was a greater blow that he failed to accomplish it. He did not share her eager desire for martyrdom, and when danger threatened he abandoned his mission.

'Oh ! my naughty father !' Catharine expostulates, 'how blessed your soul and mine would have been, could you have sealed with your blood a stone in Holy Church ! I do wish I could see you rise above your childishness, shed your milk teeth and eat bread, the mustier the better !'

She wrote teasingly, but Raimondo's failure was a bitter grief to her. Yet he remained her best friend, and it was to him she wrote the wonderful letters of her last months, now so near at hand.

Soon after her arrival Catharine advised Urban to summon the spiritual members of his party to Rome that they who were the real strength of the Church should thus meet and confer together. Catharine wrote many of the letters convoking this council. She was annoyed with William Flete because he refused to leave his wood in case the change might disturb his meditations—

Too lightly is the spirit harnessed if it is lost by change of place. It seems that God is an acceptor of places and that He is to be found only in the wood and not elsewhere in time of necessity ?

But she forgave him to whom she afterwards bequeathed the care of her work in Siena. She received between thirty and forty men and women for this spiritual conference in a house the Pope put at her disposal. Her guests lived on alms ; we hear of Catharine herself going out to beg for food, but fasting was indulged in more than eating in that household. Catharine was much occupied, conferring with Urban, encouraging him, writing letters for him, keeping up her own correspondence with her large and scattered family. But in spite of

all these activities, the poor of Rome were not forgotten.

We cannot here follow the plots and intrigues of Pope and anti-Pope and rebellious cities; they form a strange setting for Catharine's last months. When the Romans rose in revolt against Urban, her prayers were credited with quelling their rebellion. But the strain and tension of such a life were too much for her weakened body; she became more and more suffering, till she was said no more to resemble a living being. As her physical strength failed, her ardour seemed to increase. Writing to Raimondo, she urges on him that now is the time to manifest their love in constancy; to lose self utterly; that no one can enjoy the beauty of God save through the door of Christ crucified, and that door is to be found only in the Church. It contains such life that no one can kill it, but its gift is only for those willing to pay the price of love. She writes how the terrors have beaten upon the shell of her body:

> But desire became the more enkindled, crying, 'O Eternal God, receive the sacrifice of my life in this mystical body of Holy Church! I have naught to give save what Thou givest me. Take then my heart and may Thy Bride lean her face upon it!' Then Eternal God, turning the eyes of His mercy, removed my heart and offered it to Holy Church. . . .
>
> Now I say: Thanks, thanks be to the Highest God Eternal, who has placed us in the battlefield as knights, to fight for His Bride with the shield of holiest faith. The field is left free to us by that virtue and power which routed the devil who possessed the human race; who was routed, not in the strength of humanity but of Deity. Thus the devil neither is nor shall be routed by the suffering of our bodies but by strength of the fire of Divine, most ardent and immeasurable love.

Shortly after this, praying one day in S. Peter's before Giotto's *Navicella*, she felt the ship of the Church descend on her shoulders and crush her to

death ; she realized the time had come when she was to sacrifice herself to God for the Church. She lingered on till April 30, 1380, in an agony joyfully suffered for that end. ' My life is being distilled and consumed in this sweet Spouse,' she wrote to Raimondo ; ' I in this fashion, the glorious martyrs with their blood.' She asked him to take charge of her writings, and so far as he could, to look after her spiritual family that they might not be left scattered like sheep without a shepherd. ' I think to do more for them and for you after my death than in my life,' she wrote. Just before the end she accused herself of ingratitude and want of ardour in her work for the Church and for the salvation of souls.

I have not reverenced the innumerable gifts and graces of so many sweet torments and sufferings as has pleased Thee to lay on this weak body, and therefore I have not borne them with that inflamed desire and love with which Thou hast given them to me.

Thus to the last she was true to her conviction that not only can one soul reach out to and suffer for another, but that it can make vicarious reparation for sin.

Catharine consciously directed all her efforts by the promptings she received from the ' Truth.' Though we have seen her teaching in her life, it may be briefly summed up here as she summed it up to her family gathered round her during her last days in Rome.

In her method of direction, if her intense love of souls can be thus drily described, she was very humble ; she was ' the servant and slave of the servants of Jesus Christ.' She identified herself with her disciples ; their sins and temptations were hers too ; they were to trust in the love of God and know He permitted those things for love,

even though they could not understand why. God would not try them beyond their endurance ; they were to cease from wrestling with temptations and despairs ; to turn away from them and look to Christ in ' meek, continuant prayer ' ; to have victory over things and bear themselves with manly courage.

In her youth she had recognized, she said, that in order to give herself to God it was necessary to strip herself of every love outside of God, for the heart cannot be given to Him unless it is free and single. She had tried to do this, though it entailed suffering, but she had wished to seek God through suffering. That her ideal was no inhuman one we see from the very tender love she had for her friends and her ' children ' ; it was, however, what Jacopone called ' an ordered love.'

She had tried to keep balance and steadiness by remembering that everything came to her from God. She had been shown that she could never come to perfection save through prayer. And in order to attain purity of mind it was necessary to abstain from judgement of neighbours and idle talk about their doings ; if sin was observed in them, judgement must not be passed on it ; it must be offered up with compassion to God. Here we see the secret of Catharine's patience with popes and city fathers and those ordinary people who failed her again and again. Finally she exhorted her family :

> Love one another, my children, love one another ! for by this shall you show that you have had me and own me for mother and I shall hold you to be my most beloved children ; for, by being virtuous, you will be my glory and my crown. And I will pray the Divine Goodness to pour out upon you all the abundance of gifts and graces which it has pleased Him to infuse into my soul.

Love was for Catharine as for Julian, the one essential thing which embraced all others. Again and again in her letters we come on the radiant phrase : ' Nails would not have held God-and-man fast to the Cross, had Love not held Him there.'

And in spite of the fact that for love she took the sins of others upon herself and atoned for them, she is one of the most joyous of the saints. She exulted in suffering, not morbidly or austerely but gaily, as something she could do and bear for God and her neighbour. That was the spirit in which she gave herself to Christ and in which she felt He gave Himself to her. ' *I* was in thy heart ! ' He had said to her. It was with His virtue and not with her own that she fought her battles, and this, the whole secret of her life, she summed up in the exultant exclamation :

Love ! Love ! I have conquered Thee with Thyself !

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S. CATHARINE OF GENOA
1447–1510

BORN nearly seventy years after her namesake of Siena, Catharine of Genoa was born into a very different sphere from that of the dyer's daughter. She belonged to the Fieschi, one of the most illustrious of all the Guelph families of Genoa. There were two Popes among Catharine's ancestors on her father's side; he himself had been Viceroy of Naples, and one of her cousins was a member of the College of Cardinals. Her mother too belonged to an old and noble family. Yet though outwardly the circumstances of the two Catharines were as different as they well could be, they had much in common. They both consecrated their whole lives to spiritual ends and in both this consecration led to active work; they were both women of powerful intellect; they both left teaching valuable for future generations; they both gathered a band of disciples round them; they both found in the Eucharist not only the centre of institutional religion but the strength of their daily lives. But while Catharine of Siena was a visionary conscious of intimate communion with Christ, her namesake of Genoa directed all her longing and desire towards the Eternal and Infinite God. Yet while her bent was definitely philosophic, she combined the Platonic, the ardent, and the practical in a manner which is as unique as it is difficult to convey.

The Fieschi Palace in which Caterina Fiesca

was born towards the end of the year 1447, stood in the Piazza San Lorenzo facing the Cathedral of that name. It was her parish church and it contained the tomb of one of her illustrious ancestors, as well as an altar to S. Catharine of Alexandria after whom our saint was probably called. She was the youngest of five children, three boys and two girls. Columbus had been born in Genoa just a year earlier ; his voyages and discoveries must have been among the events which thrilled her fellow citizens during her lifetime, thrilled Catharine herself, deeply aware as she was of the vastness and splendour of creation as an expression of God's light and love.

She had the good fortune to be born into a world untroubled by religious controversy ; the only conflict she had to face was that of her own imperfections. She was thirteen years old when she was first seriously attracted to the religious life, though we hear of penances she inflicted on herself before that and of a *Pieta* which hung in her room and affected her profoundly whenever her eyes rested on it. Her sister Limbania was a Foundress and Canoness of the Augustinian Order of our Lady of Graces in Genoa, and that being so, Catharine thought she also might be received there. Her confessor was the chaplain of this convent which was less than a mile from Catharine's home. ' Up one of the many steep, narrow, little alleys we arrive at last at a level, all but deserted, sun-baked Piazza called after its church, Santa Maria in Passione. Face this church and the long, tall house on your left hand, covered with dim, faded frescoes, is Limbania's Convent so loved by Catharine.' [1]

[1] Von Hügel, *The Mystical Element of Religion as studied in S. Catharine of Genoa and her friends*, p. 100. No one now

While Catharine was urging her family and her confessor to let her enter the convent, her father died. She was thought too young to know her own mind and, moreover, it was thought she might be useful to cement a feud between the Fieschi and the Adorni, another equally old and illustrious Guelph family, by marrying Giuliano Adorno. It was not considered necessary to consult her wishes, and so two profoundly indifferent young people were sacrificed in the hope of making peace between rival factions.

They were married in the Cathedral of San Lorenzo in 1463. Giuliano was wealthy, he had no occupation, he was totally undisciplined, devoted to the pleasures of the world, and, finally, he had nothing in common with his young wife. They lived partly with her mother in the Fieschi Palace, partly with his people in the Adorni Palace near the Piazza Annunciata. In summer they went out to Giuliano's country seat at Prà on the Riviera, about six miles from Genoa.

Catharine was much alone. She used to walk

coming to the study of this saint can do so without basing such study on this great book. For even though it penetrates into regions into which this humble effort cannot follow it, we yet come in it upon passages in which the Baron explains S. Catharine to us as no one else can explain her; the life of one saint is illumined by the radiance of another. The Baron spent a great part of his life on researches into the history and spiritual significance of S. Catharine of Genoa, and although we have the printed *Vita e Dottrina*, he worked from the original manuscripts, and it is to his analysis of the material he found there that he owes more, he says, than to all the printed matter. The printed *Vita* suffers from repetition and want of arrangement; it ignores details of time and place, and although I have had the inestimable privilege of working from the Baron's own copy, I make no apology for reading it in the light of the *Mystical Element*, a book by which this whole study is informed.

or ride over through the woods to a Benedictine Monastery, San Niccolo in Boschetto, which was closely connected with the Convent of Augustinian Canonesses of Genoa. That connection with the convent she so deeply loved was a comfort to the disillusioned young bride. She tried to live the life Giuliano enjoyed, but she had neither inclination nor aptitude for it, and soon she began to despair. Life had failed her, she thought. She saw nothing but a dreary waste of years ahead and she sank down into an apathy of moral and spiritual stagnation.

By the spring of 1473 when Catharine had been ten years married, she had discovered that she could find no solace for her hard life in the diversions and vanities of the world. We read in the *Vita* :

> She suffered inconsolably from sadness ; this was constantly increased by the opposition of her husband's disposition to her own which distressed her so much that one day (it was the vigil of S. Benedict), having gone to the church of that saint (over the little wooded hill-path), she exclaimed in her grief, ' Pray to God for me, O S. Benedict, that for three months He may keep me sick in bed ! ' (*Vita*, i.)

A request prompted presumably by the desire that the social life she so hated might have to stop ! Two days later she went into Genoa to see her sister Limbania. She was in such distress of mind that although she felt she could not go to confession, Limbania advised her at least to go and ask the blessing of the chaplain at the convent, ' for he was indeed a holy man.'

> The moment she knelt before him her heart was pierced by so sudden and immense a love of God, accompanied by so penetrating a sight of her miseries and sins and of His goodness, that she was near falling to the ground. And in a transport of pure and all-purifying love, she was drawn away from the miseries of the world ; and as it were beside herself, kept crying out within herself : ' No more world ; no more

sins.' And at that moment she felt, that had she had in her possession a thousand worlds, she would have thrown them all away. (*Vita*, ii.)

This was the beginning of her new life. Yet though we are told that 'she *suddenly* received in her heart the wound of the unmeasured love of God,' it was really the consummation of a movement long prepared in the dreary years of seeking. It was probably in these years of spacious leisure that she read the books to which she was to owe so much, and laid the foundations of that intimate knowledge of neo-Platonic philosophy which was so deeply to colour her thought.

The centre of her interest was now shifted from herself to her Most Pure Love; she was suddenly 'all instructed in prayer.' From that time she was led on in an ever-growing and expanding movement of adoration and self-giving. 'O Love!' she exclaimed, 'can it be that Thou hast called me with so much love and revealed to me in one instant what no tongue can describe?' Her sorrow for her sins against Infinite Goodness was so great, her biographer tells us, 'that if she had not been specially supported her heart would have broken and she would have died.' All through her life such vivid spiritual lights would come upon her, though after her first four penitential years she lived more and more constantly and consciously in the presence of God.

We cannot hope to understand her without trying to understand her special temperament and her special cultural background. Here Baron von Hügel helps us in both regards. He gives us first a vivid picture, not only of her personal appearance, but of the qualities and habits of her mind.

The beautiful tall figure; the noble oval face, with its lofty brow, finely formed nose and powerful indeed obstinate chin;

SCIUTTO

S. CATHARINE OF GENOA
From an oil painting in the Sacristy
of the Church of the Pammatone Hospital, Genoa

the winning countenance with its delicate complexion and curling, sensitive, spiritual mouth-line ; deep grey-blue spiritual eyes ; the long tapering fingers ; the massive dark brown or black hair ; still more the quickly and intensely impressionable, nervous, tense, and active physical and psychical organization . . . the affectionate, ardent, aspiring, impatient, and absolute qualities and habits of her mind, heart, and will—all these things we are not merely told, we can still see them and find them in part even in her remains, but more fully in her portrait and above all in her numerous authentic utterances.[1]

When we come to consider her cultural background we find it such a vast subject that we can here only suggest its implications. Catharine owed everything she did not derive from her own experiences to four main sources—the writings of S. John and S. Paul, the Christian neo-Platonist writings, and the Franciscan teaching she imbibed through the *Laude* of Jacopone da Todi which she often read and expounded. In the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite she was brought into direct touch with the teaching of Proclus and the great non-Christian Plotinus who so profoundly influenced Christian thought through S. Augustine. In a deeply interesting chapter,[2] the Baron traces the origin of many of Catharine's doctrines, many even of her symbols. Yet it was of course, as he points out, her own spiritual affinity to similar states and ideals, even more her own experience of them, which made these writings not only the stimulation but the expression of her own inner life.[3]

It is thus partly through the naturally philosophic bent of her mind, partly through the influence of neo-Platonic doctrine, that Catharine always describes her deepest experiences in the Hellenic and Platonic manner. She rarely, for instance,

[1] Von Hügel, op. cit., i. 97.
[2] Op. cit. ii., cap. x.
[3] Op cit., ii. 62.

speaks of God or Christ in a personal or claimful way, but usually in the abstract as Love, Fire, Ocean, Light, etc.; God is for her 'an Ocean of Being in which to quench and drown her small, clamorous individuality'; [1] the dross is washed away in these purifying waters and her real spiritual personality is transformed and merged in God, the Supreme Spirit.

It was from Dionysius too that she borrowed the doctrine of the Circle which he in his turn had borrowed from Proclus. 'Everything caused both abides in its cause and proceeds from it and returns to it.' Back from Proclus through Plotinus, this doctrine derives ultimately from Plato, who in his *Symposium* teaches that since it is the love of things Good and Beautiful which makes the soul seek the Ultimate Good and Beauty, therefore seeker and Sought must not be regarded as two distinct principles, but as one principle, 'an everlasting circle whirling round.' The genius of S. Augustine expressed this in simple words, *Thou art the love wherewith the heart loves Thee.* Jacopone repeated it,[2] so that Catharine found this and other Platonic teaching in him too, though sometimes with a Franciscan flavour. It is probably to Jacopone's combination of soaring mysticism and abstract thought that she owes her own blend of the ardent and the Platonic. But in addition to what she derived from and had in common with these four sources, she had her own great doctrine of Purgatory, which, as she formulated it later, we will consider later.

[1] Op. cit., p. 101.

[2] *Laude*, lxxxi. 26. *Amor, tu se'quel ama, donde lo cor te ama.* An English translation by Mrs. Theodore Beck of the most important *Laude* is to be found in *Jacopone da Todi, A Spiritual Biography*, by Evelyn Underhill.

It was probably on the day following her first great experience that Catharine had a vision of Christ carrying His Cross on His shoulder, dripping with blood, ' so that the whole house seemed to be full of rivulets of that blood which she saw to have been all shed because of love alone.' She was filled with loathing for herself because of her sins and exclaimed, ' O Love ! if it be necessary, I am willing to confess my sins in public ! ' This she did four days later in the Convent Chapel, ' with such contrition as to pierce her soul ' (*Vita*, ii).

Though since her marriage Catharine had had no special desire for the Holy Eucharist, from the day after this vision of Christ, such desire was implanted in her, and from a date in May, two months later, she received it daily for the rest of her life, with rare exceptions occasioned by her latterly feeble health. The Eucharist was the mainstay of her life, not for the joy it gave her but for the life it brought. She regarded it, like S. John, as the living bread, a Sacrament in which ' the eternal Christ-God ' offered Himself as spiritual food to His children, who were consumed with insatiable hunger for Him. She did not distinguish between God and Christ. Her devotion was to the all-embracing Reality. She believed that in the Eucharist she received the Bread of Life from God in a divine operation which filled it with the Supreme Spirit and endowed it with eternal life. Her soul was fixed on God ; she thought not of the gift but the Giver, as the *Vita* plainly tells us :

> One day when she had communicated there came to her so much odour and so much sweetness that she felt as though in Paradise. But turning at once towards her Love she said, ' O Love ! wouldest Thou perchance draw me to Thee with these delights ? I desire them not, since I desire but Thee and Thee whole and entire ! ' (*Vita*, iii.)

The practice of daily Communion was at that time very unusual, and this was a trial to Catharine who much disliked her religion to be conspicuous ; she was even known to walk a mile out of the town to communicate, that no one might see her. The Sacrament itself she received with awe, but also with eager delight. When she saw the elements on the altar, or in the hands of the priest, she would say within herself, ' O swiftly, swiftly speed it to the heart, since it is the heart's true food ! ' Often at Mass she was so interiorly occupied as not to hear one word of it, but when the time came for her to go up to the altar, at that instant she became conscious of exterior things, and she would say, ' O Lord ! it seems to me that if I were dead, I should return to life to receive Thee ! ' (*Vita*, iii).[1]

Though Catharine so greatly disliked being different from her neighbours in her practice, she was so different in that until the last eleven years of her life, she had no one to direct her. For twenty-five years, according to the *Vita* :

> She was guided and taught interiorly by tender Love alone, without the means of any creature, either religious or secular. . . . If she attempted to lean on any one, Love instantly caused her mental suffering so great, that she was obliged to desist, saying, ' O Love, I understand Thee ! '

And when she was told it would be wiser and better, seeing that her way was so different and so intense, to live by skilled advice, these doubts were answered by her Lord :

> Confide in Me and doubt not ! . . . Take from the remainder of Scripture this one word *Love* with which thou shalt ever walk straight . . . enlightened, without error and without guide or means provided by any other creature. (*Vita*, xliv.)

[1] Here she is possibly echoing Jacopone who in *Laude* xcix exclaims, ' O living river of Delight . . . that causest the very dead to return to their vigour ! '

By the autumn of the year of her conversion, Giuliano had completed the squandering of his fortune ; they had to leave the Adorni Palace in Genoa and sell the country seat at Prà. This seems to have opened his eyes to the futility of his life, for he now began to turn his thoughts to other things and became interested in religion, though, as Baron von Hügel significantly adds, ' in his own manner and degree.' He had the courage to tell Catharine of the existence of a little daughter for whom he was responsible, news she received with great generosity, ultimately taking this little Thobia (called after Giuliano's mother) to live with her. They now moved into a small house in the working-class quarter of Genoa near the *Ospedale di Pammatone*. They still had a comfortable income, so that this going to live among the poor and share their lives, was no necessary economy but a work of pure charity. The house they lived in is probably the very house still standing where the Via San Giuseppe joins the Via Balilla, and can be identified by pictures of S. Catharine and S. Camillus of Lellis on its façade.

Giuliano now became a member of the Third Order of S. Francis, as did their little maid, Benedetta Lombarda. It is interesting that Catharine herself now felt no need of even this connection with a religious Order, though as a girl she had longed to consecrate herself to such a life. Her utter self-dedication was beginning to show her how she was to serve God in the world, and her soul was so closely united to her Most Pure Love, that she felt no need of any earthly bond.

For four years after her conversion Catharine was obsessed by the sense of her sins, driven to practise severe penances and mortifications, anything which might still the sharp sense of the

contrast between the perfection of Love and the imperfection of self. She did not enter on this course calmly, but with a vehemence as if on fire within. It was the training for her life of consecration. No half measures seemed any use:

> She deprived her nature of all that it desired and obliged it to take what it disliked. She wore haircloth and ate no meat, nor fruit of any kind, either fresh or dried. Being by nature courteous and affable, she did great violence to herself by conversing as little as possible with her relatives when they visited her. . . . She practised great austerity in sleeping, lying down on sharply-pointed things. . . . The fire within was so great that she took no account of exterior things relating to the body, although she neglected no necessary work. No temptations except those of her natural inclinations could affect her. . . . She so resisted her natural inclinations that they were completely destroyed. Temptations could not approach the flames of pure love enkindled in her heart. Her eyes were always cast down. During the first four years of her conversion she spent six hours daily in prayer, for such was the obedience of her body to her spirit, that it dared not rebel, although it greatly felt the strain. . . . During these first four years that interior fire that was consuming her produced such extreme hunger and so quickly did she digest her food, that she could have devoured iron. So powerful was her interior feeling that she was unable to speak except in a tone so low as to be barely audible. (*Vita*, v.)

Her friends sometimes asked Catharine why she thus mortified herself. 'I do not know,' she would answer, 'I feel myself inwardly and irresistibly drawn to do so. . . . I think it is God's will.' She was continuously haunted by the sight of her sins and imperfections, obsessed by the need for self-conquest, overwhelmed by the graces God showered upon her. She longed, like S. Teresa, 'to make some payment in return.' And she was now shown how to serve God in His people.

Those who lived in that poor little quarter of Genoa were struggling artisans, many of them dyers. The hospital close by had room for a

hundred and thirty patients and it was always full ; near it was the Foundling Hospital with over a hundred girl inmates who were being trained as silk-weavers. Among Catharine's friends were several who belonged to the *Donne della Misericordia*, an Order of Mercy which worked among the poor. But Catharine shrank instinctively from dirt and squalor ! The first necessity therefore was to conquer this fastidiousness. She set about it with grim resolution.

> She cleansed the houses of the poor from the most disgusting filth. . . . She tended the sick with the most fervent affection, speaking to them of spiritual things and ministering to their bodily wants, and never avoiding any form of disease however terrible. (*Vita*, viii.)

She had at this time one intimate friend, her cousin Tommasina. She was a Dominican Tertiary, a widow, an intellectual woman who probably introduced Catharine to the works of Dionysius, seeing that she herself wrote a treatise on them. She too was deeply drawn to religion, though she was not so passionate about it as Catharine who ' drove her on with vehemence. She showed some of that precious gift of humour denied her otherwise greater cousin. For, no doubt with a bright twinkle in her eyes, she declared that Catharine was giving her no quarter and that it would be a great humiliation if, after all were said and done, she were to turn back ! Catharine could not even understand such a possibility. " If I were to turn back," she declared, " I would wish that my eyes might be put out ! " ' [1]

She now lost her excessive sin-and-self-occupation in an ever expanding movement of love and adoration. The thought of her sins was so far removed from her mind, that ' she did not catch

[1] Von Hügel, op. cit., i. 132.

a glimpse of them ; it was as if they had all been cast into the sea' (*Vita*, II. v.). Although her interior occupation often carried her away, it never prevented her fulfilling her duties to others, ' she gave no cause of complaint to any one ' the *Vita* assures us.

> After the four years above mentioned, her mind became clear and free and so filled with God that nothing else ever entered it. . . . She would at times have her mind so full of divine love as to be all but incapable of speaking ; and would be in so great a transport of feeling as to be obliged to hide herself so as not to be seen. She would lose the use of her senses and remain like one dead ; and, to escape the occurrence of such things, she would force herself to remain in company as much as possible. And she would say to her Lord : ' I do not want that which proceedeth from Thee, I want Thee alone, O tender Love.' But just because her love was so sincere and she fled from consolations, her Lord gave her of them all the more. . . .
>
> If when she had hidden herself away in some secret place, she was discovered . . . she was found with her face in her hands, prostrate on the ground, entranced, lost in regions beyond speech or thought. Being called, however loudly, she would not hear. At other times she would walk up and down as if lost to self . . . she would remain as if lifeless for the space of six hours, but hearing herself called, she at once aroused herself and answered, attending even to the smallest things, and in thus leaving the All, she went without any sorrow, because she fled all self-seeking as it were the devil. And when she came forth from such secret place her face was rosy and glowing as might have been a cherub's and she seemed to say, ' Who shall separate me from the love of God ? ' (*Vita*, vi.)

Thus, far from unfitting her for the work of the world, Catharine came forth from such encounters strengthened and invigorated in body and soul. It was the same with her fasts, which, like her namesake of Siena, she practised because she could not do otherwise ; they were not undertaken as a penance ; her penitential period was now over ;

she did not eat simply because she could not. Her fasts began in response to a vivid interior command when her Lord asked her to keep the forty days in His company in the wilderness.

> And then she began to be unable to eat until Easter; on the three Easter days she was able to eat, and after these again she did not eat till she had fulfilled as many days as are to be found in Lent. (*Vita*, iv.)

In the same way in Advent, till it began 'she would eat like any one else and then her fast would begin and would continue up till Christmas Day.' According to the custom then prevailing she would, however, receive, as an ablution after her Communion, about a wineglassful of wine, and she did now and then drink a tumblerful of pounded rock salt, vinegar, and water.[1] So that while her fasts were not absolute, they were terribly severe and she practised them for nearly twenty-three years. During them she was more active in good works, stronger and more radiant than usual; whereas the attempt to eat, which she often repeated to avoid making herself conspicuous, made her ill. And when her friends marvelled at this strange thing, she wondered they could bother about anything so unimportant:

> 'Ah!' she would say, 'if you but knew another thing which I feel within myself! This incapacity to eat is indeed an operation of God but one in which my will has no part, hence I cannot glory in it.' (*Vita*, iv.)

Catharine considered that the most perfect love of God could be practised and achieved in the world as well as in the cloister. The *Vita* tells us how one day a friar-preacher, in order to try her or humiliate her, declared that he could love God better than she could because he had consecrated his life to

[1] Von Hügel, op. cit., i. 135.

religion while she had 'married the world.' Catharine sprang to her feet, beside herself, and declared passionately that if she thought his habit could add one spark to her love she would tear it from him. 'Whatever you merit by your renunciation,' she exclaimed, 'that is yours! I do not seek it! But that I cannot love God as much as you can, that you will never make me believe!' She was so wrought up and spoke with such fervour that her hair came undone and fell down about her shoulders—and yet her very vehemence was full of dignity and grace. And when she got home to her own room she cried out: 'O Love! who shall prevent me from loving Thee? Even if I were not only in the world as I am, but if I should find myself in a camp of soldiers, nothing should prevent me from loving Thee!' An incident which Baron von Hügel thinks characteristic of her at her deepest—'the breadth and the fullness, the self-oblivion and the dignity, the claimlessness and spiritual power—all are there.' [1]

Though Catharine lived in the world she certainly had not married it. Her hard and exacting work in slum and hospital was balanced by deep and fruitful contemplation from which she came forth 'joyous and rosy-faced.' And even while her surface consciousness was busy with other things—and the life of nurse or matron in a city hospital does not offer much leisure—she never allowed Martha to efface Mary; all her activities were given supernatural intention.

> Say, did you go,
> Great soul and sweet,
> When first His message reached your weary heart,
> Far in the wilderness your Love to greet
> From all mean things apart?

[1] *Vita*, xix Von Hügel, op. cit., i. 141.

Not so :
But down the alleys that His footsteps trod
Between the blind, the ailing, and the lame,
Steadfast in ministry you came—
Yet swift to the encounter of your God. . . .[1]

Catharine's life had now a solid foundation of contemplation ; she had, as she said, 'given the keys of the house to love' ; she had abandoned self-responsibility in unlimited self-giving. She gave herself whole-heartedly to every duty which presented itself ; even the smallest of them appeared to her to come from God and thus to demand her whole attention. She saw God in everything :

The glorious God is the whole essence of things both visible and invisible. He is that Infinite Perfection, that Boundless Love which gives life to the soul, without which it cannot live. . . . Every good thing belongs to God. . . . All the sanctity of the saints is outside of them and all in God.

And this consciousness of God and the demands such consciousness makes on her, she brings into the scheme of her daily life :

The Divine moment is the present moment. When the duty involved in it is accomplished, it is permitted to pass away as if it had never been, to give way to the acts and duties of the moment which comes after.

Such a disposition spelt for her the transition from tenseness to tranquillity. It was achieved through absolute confidence in God, absolute detachment from self.

'She would quietly concentrate each moment,' says Baron von Hügel, 'upon that moment's special content—upon God's gift and will of special suffering or joy, of determination, effort, decision, and the like, conveyed within that moment. Such a scheme follows out something similar, within the spiritual life, to the action of the sun upon the sun-dial in physical life. The

[1] Evelyn Underhill, 'S. Catharine of Genoa,' in *Immanence*, p. 70.

sun successively touches and illumines this and then that, and then the next radius of the dial . . . a genial, quiet death to self lies in every minute, when the minute is thus taken separately as the dear will and direct vehicle of God.' [1]

That this was indeed the disposition of Catharine's mind we see from the Rule of Life she lived by at this time :

Observe, little daughter, three rules. Never say *I will*, or *I will not*. Never say *mine* but ever say *our*. Never excuse thyself but be ever ready to accuse thyself. . . .

When thou sayest the *Our Father* take for thy foundation, *Thy will be done*. In the *Hail Mary* take *Jesus*. In Holy Scripture take *Love* with which thou wilt ever go straightly, exactly, lightly, attentively, swiftly, enlightenedly, without error, without guide, and without the means of other creatures, since Love sufficeth unto itself to do all things without fear or weariness, so that martyrdom itself appears unto it a joy. (*Vita*, vi.)

Developing from this, from her intense adoration and her moments of union, Catharine came to feel in a strange but definite way, due to the naturally philosophic bent of her mind as well as to the Platonic doctrine she had imbibed, that her thoughts and acts were no longer her own but were transformed by the union of her soul with her Love. Scattered through the *Vita* we come to such utterances as these :

My me is God, nor do I know myself except in Him.

I have no longer either soul or heart of my own ; my soul and heart are those of my Love !

My being is God, not by simple participation but by a true transformation of my blessedness.

God is my being, my me, my strength, my beatitude, my good, my delight !

Although in these exclamations she was perhaps to some extent following the teaching of Dionysius on the deification of the spirit through participa-

[1] Von Hügel, *Essays and Addresses*, second series, p. 227.

tion in the Divine, her experience was obviously her own. She not only knew herself to be indwelt and enfolded by the vast all-embracing Perfection of which she was so vividly aware; she felt herself actually transformed into that very Spirit of Love and Power. Jacopone had had the same experience:

> There where Christ is enclosed (in the soul) all the old is changed by Him—the one is transformed into the Other in a marvellous union. To live as I yet not I, my very being to be not mine; this is so great a cross-purpose that I know not how to define it. . . . (*Laude*, lviii. 28, 30.)
>
> As iron which is all on fire, as dawn made resplendent by the sun, lose their own form and exist in another, so it is with the pure mind when clothed by Thee, O Love! (*Laude*, lxxxviii. 21.)

We must now consider the practical work to which Catharine's spiritual life impelled her. In 1479 she and her husband gave up their own house and went to live in two rooms in the hospital, spending all their time in its service. A year later Giuliano died, but Catharine lived on there for eleven years, working at first as one of the nurses.

> The spacious high, white-washed, stone-flagged wards with the great tall windows shedding floods of glaring light or cheerful sunshine according to the season without and the mood of the poor sick within, stand still as they stood in Catharine's day. True, new wards have been added; the lay nurses of her time have been in part replaced by nursing sisters . . . and yet the mystery of devoted love . . . remains with all the freshness of an elemental force, indestructible, inexhaustible. This devoted work of Catharine's, this her serving of the sick 'with the most fervent affection and immense solicitude,' had also the remarkable circumstance about it that 'notwithstanding all this . . . she never was without the consciousness of her tender Love nor did she, because of this consciousness, fail in any practical matter concerning the hospital.' [1]

In 1490 Catharine was elected matron, an office

[1] Von Hügel, *Mystical Element*, i. 143. *Vita*, viii.

she filled for six years. In addition to all the organization and detail she had to attend to, large sums of money passed through her hands, and yet the *Vita* assures us, 'her accounts were never found wrong by a single farthing.'

In 1493 plague broke out. It had been a bitter winter; the great harbour was frozen over; all who could fled from the town, and of those who remained more than three-quarters died of plague. Catharine organized the ambulances, the semi-open-air wards (thus showing a belief in fresh air much ahead of her time), the greatly increased staff of nurses. She filled the ground behind the hospital with sail-cloth tents where monks and priests and tertiaries helped in nursing the plague-stricken people. She was everywhere in the midst of them, the central figure in that grim fight against death. Towards the end of the outbreak, a dying woman, no longer able to speak, seemed in response to Catharine's entreaty to 'Call Jesus' to be trying to say His Name. Overjoyed, Catharine bent down and kissed her and so herself caught the plague and all but died of it. A foolish action no doubt; but a heavenly one.

It was probably during the plague that Catharine first met Ettore Vernazza, the Genoese lawyer who became one of her most faithful disciples and to whom we owe at least the first part of the *Vita*, for he kept a record of all her sayings. When his daughter Tommasina was born, Catharine stood sponsor for the little girl afterwards to be known as the Venerable Battista Vernazza. She became a nun in Catharine's beloved Augustinian Convent and lived there for seventy-seven years. Active in everything connected with the welfare of Genoa, she was also a contemplative of depth and beauty who handed down much of Catharine's teaching.

When Giuliano died he left Catharine £1,100 for herself as well as all his personal belongings, and he asked her to look after Thobia and her mother, a legacy she discharged with great generosity. The rest of his money she allotted according to his instructions and with added thoughtfulness on her own part which showed that whatever her interior occupation, it did not cause her to forget her earthly ties. In this connection we may remember here how she used to wonder about this herself and how she once asked her Lord :

> Thou hast commanded me that I should love my neighbour and I cannot love any one but Thee ! What then shall I do ? And she was answered, He who loves Me, loves also all whom I love. It is not in himself but in God that one's neighbour should be loved. (*Vita*, xxiii.)

In 1496, after she had been matron for six years, she had to resign that post on account of failing health. She still lived on in the hospital and helped in its work, but this year marked the beginning of a strange nervous illness which troubled her intermittently till her death. Catharine herself was well aware that her illness was nervous in character. She could not help it, but she put it bravely behind her as something to be borne but not worried about, to be utilized and transcended. Her friends were apt to regard the seizures she had then as similar in character to the health-giving ecstasies of her earlier life, a fact which sometimes distressed Catharine. ' Why did you let me remain in that quietude,' she once asked them, ' from which I have almost died ? '

From 1499 when her health finally gave way, she was supported by the friendship of Dom Marabotto, who then became priest of the hospital and Catharine's confessor. He helped her chiefly by giving her back when asked teaching and advice

she had given him on some previous occasion. But even though he did so befriend her, she walked a lonely way. Once when she thought she was alone Marabotto heard her say, 'There is no creature that understands me! I find myself alone, unknown, poor, naked, a stranger, and different from all the world!' Yet she did find comfort in having him beside her; she used to say that they understood each other 'even just by looking one another in the face without speaking.' It is probably to him that we owe the second half of the *Vita*.

In these last years when much of an invalid, Catharine had more time for conversing with the disciples who had now gathered round her, and it is to her conversations with them that we owe most of her teaching. For she herself did not write one line of her so-called *Writings*; they were taken down from her lips by Ettore Vernazza and Dom Marabotto.

We are told that once when Vernazza was with her, probably also his wife and Marabotto, 'she was surrounded by the deep and powerful ocean of her Love and wished to tell her spiritual children something of her joy.'

'O would that I could tell you what my heart feels!' she exclaimed. 'I cannot find words appropriate to so great a love. But this I can say with truth, that if of what my heart feels one drop were to fall into hell, hell itself would turn into eternal life!'

Vernazza, loath to let such blessing pass them by, implored her, 'O Mother! could you not ask your Love for some of these little drops of union for your children?' And she answered 'with still greater joy':

I see this tender Love to be so full of kindness to my sons, that for them I can ask nothing of Him, I can only present them before Him!

This sheds an illuminating light on one aspect of Catharine's prayer; it was not an asking-for-things, rather a holding up of the soul she prayed for before God, her own soul widely opened and receptive to every impulse of the Divine, ready to be used as His instrument, to work His will on souls. Yet in cases of special need, she did ask for special graces. 'Lord! give me this soul!' she had implored when Giuliano was impatient in his long illness. 'I beg Thee to give it me for I know Thou canst do so!' Another time when drawn to pray for something special, she was instructed interiorly, 'Command! for love is free to do so!'

Her disciples looked forward eagerly to her 'conferences' with them. Sometimes, they tell us, she discoursed to them of Divine Love in such wise that they felt as though in Paradise. Their description reminds us of the conversation of S. Augustine and his mother at Ostia—

> He who spoke and he who listened each fed on spiritual food of a delicious kind. . . . They could never get enough, but all on fire within they would remain there unable at last to speak, unable to depart as though in ecstasy.

It was in such moments that her biographer compared her face to that of a seraph, because when speaking of supernatural joys it had a radiant and luminous appearance; from that and from a difficult legend she came to be known as the Seraph of Genoa.

Catharine was apt to be impatient; to long to see where she was being led. She recognized this as an imperfection and spoke of it to her disciples, how if the soul could know beforehand the successive degrees God meant to give it, it would never be quiet. Every day she felt that her faults were being removed from her by her Most

Pure Love. She knew she could neither detect these faults herself nor bear the sight of herself as God saw her. She must not ask to understand but must be as a trustful child in the hands of its Father. And so she prayed :

Be Thou my understanding : thus shall I know that which it may please Thee that I should know. Nor will I henceforth weary myself with seeking : but I will abide in peace with Thine understanding which shall wholly occupy my mind. I will not turn my eyes except towards Love. There will I stay and not move. I see all good to be in Thee. My spirit can find no place but Thee for its repose. . . . O God ! I do not wish to follow Thee for Thy gifts ! I want Thyself alone ! I want nothing but Thee alone !

It makes her more real to us to remember that she liked pretty things. After her health began to give way, Marabotto suggested that she should allow herself a few comforts. And so among the things found in her rooms in the hospital after her death were three down coverlets, one of vermilion silk, the others of plainer white stuff. In the other room, which had blue curtains, were two silk gowns ; and among other things, two silver cups and saucers, various silver spoons, pewter candlesticks, a three-legged table, and a few little bits of furniture. A favourite *Maesta* triptych she had already given away. Von Hügel groups these things in an interesting way :

The silver service is a survival from her . . . wealthy, worldly days ; the pewter candlesticks and rough, spare furniture belong to her penitential period and mood ; the soft, warm, gay-coloured coverlet and apparel of rich material are characteristic of her later years . . . when she allowed herself greater freedom in matters of external mortification, reserving now the fullness of her attention to matters of interior disposition and purification.[1]

As her weakness and suffering increased, so did

[1] Von Hügel, op. cit., i. 299.

her sympathy and tenderness, not only for her friends but for all created things.

She was most compassionate towards all creatures ; so that if an animal were killed or a tree cut down, she could hardly bear to see them lose that being which God had given them. (*Vita*, xlii.)

She sometimes felt the strain and tension of life lived thus upon two planes, almost unbearable. Her mind seemed to her ' as if in a mill and that mill grinding her body and soul ; and to divert such depression she would walk up and down the garden and would address the plants and trees and say, Are ye not also creatures created by my God ? Are ye not too obedient to Him ? And she would at times seize hold of the thorn-covered twigs of the rose bushes . . . and bite her hands or burn them to divert if possible her interior depression ' (*Vita*, xxvii).

Though her biographers tell us nothing more than this as to her feeling for animals, there is a saying of hers, often quoted to show her hunger for God, which incidentally shows her appreciation of the love of a dog for his master :

If I were to see the whole court of heaven all robed in one and the same manner so that there would be no apparent difference between God and the angels—even then the love which I have in my heart would recognize God in the same manner as a dog does his master. Love knows how, without means, to discover its End and ultimate Repose. (*Vita*, iii.)

Towards the end of her life she suffered from ' great burnings,' but she would escape away from her physical troubles to an atmosphere of peace when she ' spoke not but laughed joyously.' And when she came back to herself she said one thing only, ' O Lord ! do with me whatever Thou wilt ! ' (*Vita*, l). She would make the sign of the Cross over her heart when in great suffering. One day

she asked that her windows might be widely opened that she might see the sky.

And as night came on she asked that many candles might be lit, and then, as well as she could for weakness, she chanted the *Veni Creator Spiritus*. And when she had finished she fixed her eyes upon the sky and remained thus an hour and a half, making many gestures with her hands and eyes. And when she came to herself again she said repeatedly, 'Let us go!' and then added, 'No more earth! No more earth!' (*Vita*, l.)

Thus, though she longed for the expansiveness of the open windows and the starlit sky and the immensities of God, she found comfort too in the traditional hymns and worship of the Church; they rescued her from isolation and united her by invisible links with the saints of God.[1]

That she was aware of the use of position and gesture we see from various incidents. We read, for instance, how one day when in great pain she lay with arms outstretched 'so that she appeared like a body nailed to a Cross; as she was within so did she appear without.'

It was with the dawn of a September morning in 1510 that her friends saw she was leaving them. She was asked if she wished to receive Holy Communion as she had done every day up till then in spite of her weakness. Unable to speak she pointed to the sky as if to show it was there she would next meet her Lord.

And at that moment this blessed soul gently expired in great peace and tranquillity and flew to her tender and much desired Love. (*Vita*, li.)

The story of this heroic woman is one of self-conquest. She had to conquer self which she feared 'more than the devil'; to curb the mystical as well as the human element that she might grow up into full-being, a creative, spiritual personality.

[1] See von Hügel, op. cit., i. 206.

She had to spend herself on others because it was in man she could serve God.

Baron von Hügel marshals before us all the disadvantages the life of Catharine of Genoa offers the student. She is wanting in humour, he says; there is a certain monotony about her, a wearying vehemence. She reformed no Order, founded no monastery, came into neither contact nor conflict with kings or popes as her namesake of Siena did. Nor is her life lit up by the warmth of a happy home life; she had no children; she suffered from some obscure nervous illness. That is the negative side.

It is balanced if not exceeded by a rare and stimulating combination of characteristics. The very ordinariness of her external lot—a simple wife and widow, at no time belonging to any Religious Order or Congregation; the apparently complete failure of her earthly life, which gives occasion to the birth within her of the heavenly one; the rich variety and contrasts of her princely birth and social position and the lowly, homely activity and usefulness of her forty years of devotedness; the unusually perfect combination of a great external action and administrative capacity with a lofty contemplation; the apparent suddenness and whole-hearted swiftness of her conversion succeeded by the long years of interior conflict and painful growth, unhelped, practically unknown, by any one but God's inspiring Spirit . . . the strange nervous health of her later years . . . a psychic condition interesting if but for her own lofty superiority to attaching any direct importance to it. Stimulating, transfiguring, embracing all this, appears her special spiritual apprehension and teaching . . . of a spontaneity, breadth, and balance peculiarly her own.[1]

For, whatever conceptions Catharine may have derived from others, her teaching has a spontaneous and inevitable quality. Read for instance her account of the spiritual pilgrimage of man:

When the loving mercy of God calls a soul from the world, He finds it full of vices and sins. First of all He gives it an

[1] Von Hügel, op. cit., i. 88.

instinct for virtue, then He incites it to perfection, and then, by infused grace, leads it to true self-stripping and finally to true transformation. . . . When the soul is utterly selfless and transformed then it neither acts, nor speaks, nor wills, nor feels, nor hears, nor understands, and has of itself no internal or external feeling which could possibly affect it . . . in all things God alone rules and guides it without the help of any creature.

The state of this soul is then one of such peace and tranquillity that it seems to it that both heart and body and indeed its whole being is immersed in a sea of the most profound peace. . . . It remains immovable, imperturbable, impassible, so that . . . it feels nothing except this most gentle peace. And it is so full of this peace that if its flesh and bones and nerves were pressed nothing could emerge from them but peace. And all day long it says to itself for joy such rhymes as these :

Vuoi tu ch'io ti mostri presto
Che cosa è Dio ?
Pace non trova chi da lui si partìo.

It is beyond the power of the present translator to put this gay little lilt into English verse; it means, literally :

Wouldst thou that I show thee what God is ?
Peace !
That peace which no man finds who departs from Him.

It is a childish little lilt. We surprise Catharine then, deep thinker and ecstatic as she was, singing rhymes like this about her wards, giving vent to her joy, like S. Francis, in singing little songs to her Lord.[1] She too had that childlike delight in little things which we may almost call a characteristic of the saints, those unsolemn, unrigid, radiant personalities whose religion was so joyful and contagious that it even infects us to-day after the lapse of centuries. Here too Jacopone had led the

[1] ' The very unexpectedness of its conclusion,' says Miss Underhill, ' is a guarantee of its authenticity ' (*Mysticism*, p. 529 n.).

way with his 'O Love, divine Fire! Love, full of laughter and playfulness' (*Laude*, lxxix).

We have left to the last Catharine's own original doctrine, that of the purification of the soul after death; the joyful acceptance of, and even demand for, purifying pain, that the soul may become pure, and thus, freed from every stain, able with frank and fearless gaze to meet its God. This doctrine she based on her own experience, as we read in the first chapter of her *Treatise on Purgatory*:

> This holy soul,[1] while still in the flesh, was placed in the Purgatory of the burning love of God, in whose flames she was purified from every stain, so that when she passed from this life, she might be ready to enter the presence of God. . . . By means of the flame of love she comprehended . . . the condition of the souls of the faithful in Purgatory where they are purified from the rust of sin from which they have not been cleansed in this world. . . .
>
> The soul, leaving the body and not finding in itself that purity in which it was created, seeing the hindrances which prevent its union with God, conscious that only Purgatory can remove them, casts itself willingly therein. . . .
>
> There is no peace to be compared with that of the souls in Purgatory save that of the saints in Paradise, and this peace is ever augmented by the inflowing of God . . . as the hindrances are burned away. The rust of sin is the hindrance and this the fire continually burns away so that the soul . . . is continually being uncovered to be able to receive the influx of the divine. As a covered surface can never reflect the sun, not through any defect in the sun which continues to shine, but from the hindrance offered by the covering, so if the covering be gradually removed, the surface will be more and more uncovered to the sun. . . . So it is with the rust of sin which is the covering of the soul; in Purgatory the fire consumes it; the more it is consumed the more the soul reflects the true sun who is God. Its happiness increases as the rust is burned away and the soul is laid bare to the divine radiance. . . .
>
> When God finds the soul pure as when He first created it, . . He so transforms it into Himself that forgetting all it no longer sees aught beside Him. . . . When gold has been

[1] This is of course recorded by a disciple.

completely freed from dross, no fire, however great, has any further action on it, for nothing but its imperfections can be consumed. So it is with the divine fire in the soul. God retains it in these flames until every stain is burned away and it is brought to the highest perfection of which it is capable. . . . When this is accomplished it rests wholly in God. Nothing of itself remains. Its whole being is God.

This happy way of purgation Catharine saw in herself. Her soul was in her body, she felt, in a purgatory 'like to the true Purgatory.' And so she submitted gladly to the purifying disciplines of this world because they alone could fit her for the longed-for union with her Source.

She too, like Mechthild, felt the magnet drawing her powerfully home; she was always conscious of the loneliness of this world—

'I seem to myself,' she says, 'to be like those who are out of their home, who have left all their friends and relations and find themselves in a foreign land; who, having accomplished the business on which they came, stand ready to depart and return home where they ever are in heart and mind.' (*Vita*, xlii.)

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S. TERESA, 1515–1582

WHILE it seems impossible to omit S. Teresa from such a book as this, one approaches her with misgiving. The depths of her Mirror are so profound, its variety so infinite, that it seems foolhardy to attempt in few words to say anything about it. Then, too, so many real books have been written about this Castilian nun who was at once Founder, Reformer, Saint, Mystic, Writer, and Mother of souls. And her own books reveal the human, compassionate Teresa with her genius for the humour and the little things of life as well as for the vast infinities and the mountain tops. Yet it is also true that of such a virile and creative personality we can never think too much and so we shall try here to look into that part of the Mirror which reflects the character expressed in her own bracing words: *His Majesty exceedingly loveth the courageous soul.*

It is impossible to understand Teresa apart from her country. Chivalry and religion developed side by side in Spain. For eight hundred years the Spaniards struggled to conquer the Moors and win Spain for the Cross. They succeeded about twenty-five years before Teresa was born. The Jews also had tried to overthrow Christianity and set up Judaism in its place; they too were conquered and driven out. But this age-long warfare left its mark on the nation. Spain had spent itself passionately in fighting for this religious end and

that gave its faith a peculiar fervour, while the fusion of Arab and Christian races explains the characteristic spirituality of the Spaniard as well as his physiognomy.

With the cessation of warfare Spain blossomed out in every peaceful art. Teresa is no solitary figure. The sixteenth century produced a great company of mystics whose manly and militant temper is partly also to be traced to the teaching of Ignatius Loyola, born in 1491. There was a simultaneous flowering in literature, painting, and sculpture, while the artistry of the gold and silversmiths of that period can still be studied in the grilles, reliquaries, and crucifixes of the Spanish Cathedrals, whose gorgeous vestments owe much to secrets Spanish weavers learned from the Moors.

Perched on a pinnacle of grey rock, Avila of the Knights, that fortress town Teresa so deeply loved, stands like a sentinel overlooking the wild uplands of Castile. The innumerable towers of its encircling walls pierce a clear sky, for the whole atmosphere is bathed in light, a fact not perhaps without its bearing on the clear vision of our saint. The cathedral, half church, half fortress, typifies the dual nature of the Spanish soul; here too prayer and warfare join hands, for the apse of the cathedral forms part of the protecting wall of the city. Avila defended Castile from the Moors; she supported the dynasty against the ambitions of petty kings and the intrigues of warlike nobles. Once when her knights were fighting elsewhere, her women manned the battlements and held their city against the Moors. That twelfth-century epic was still told in Teresa's day. And 'it was in this hardness of life, this constant warfare, in which the religious ideal never ceased to cast

a glamour over the military aim, that the soul of Avila was forged.' [1]

Teresa was five when Luther burnt the bull of Leo X before the students of Wittenberg, thus setting a match to a conflagration which was to blaze throughout the sixteenth century and incidentally deeply to disturb Teresa ; a ' Lutheran ' was to her anathema, some one who was attacking the Church of Christ ; yet, as she often declared, she would gladly give her soul, if she had a thousand, to save one heretic.

When she was born on March 28, 1515, Avila was still in the glory of its strength ; all the great movements which agitated Europe found an echo in that warlike city. The sombre, snow-tipped Sierras, haunted by witches, infested by brigands, barred the horizon ; beyond them was for Teresa and her brothers and sisters the Country of the Unknown, the savage and the heretic ; in other words the Moor, the Saracen, the Lutheran, the Jew.

Born of the old Spanish nobility, Teresa never lost a certain pride in her lineage ; there was no drop of Moorish or Jewish blood in her veins. Her parents were serious, devout people. Her father, Don Alonso de Cepeda, that courteous nobleman, was twice married. He was much given, Teresa tells us, to the reading of ' good books,' he was generous to the poor and refused to keep slaves at a time when most Spaniards of his rank had Moorish slaves. His second wife, Doña Beatriz de Ahumada, was Teresa's mother, a beautiful but delicate creature who lay in bed reading books of chivalry. Teresa tells us about the family :

We were three sisters and nine brothers : all of us, by God's grace, like our parents in virtue, I myself excepted. One

[1] Hoornaert, *Sainte Térèse Ecrivain*, p. 25.

favourite brother I had, of about my own age. . . . We used to read together the Lives of the Saints, and as I read of the martyrdom of the Saints for God's sake it came to me that they bought their fruition of God very cheaply. And I wished very much that I might die thus, not for any love that I bore Him, but to enjoy without delay the great riches in heaven which I read of. With this brother I used to discuss how it might be accomplished. We decided to go to the country of the Moors, begging our way ' for love of God,' and to be beheaded there. And I think the Lord had given us courage enough even at so tender an age, if we had seen any way of accomplishing this. It impressed us greatly when we read that the pain and glory were for ever. Again and again we talked of this and we liked to repeat many times, *for ever and ever and ever!*

This project was attempted when Teresa was about seven. But the flight was discovered and towards evening their uncle rode back into Avila, the two disappointed children perched on his dusty saddle. This was Teresa's first great sorrow, that the glory of martyrdom was denied her. The heroic character of Christianity always appealed to her. But she was not easily daunted.

When I saw the impossibility of going where I should be put to death for the faith of God, we set about becoming hermits and in a garden which we had at home we contrived to build hermitages as best we could by piling up small stones which soon fell down ; and so we found no way of satisfying our wishes. . . . I gave alms as I could—and that was but little. I contrived to be alone in order to perform my devotions which were long, and especially the rosary to which my mother was very much devoted and taught us to be so too. When I played with other little girls I loved to build convents and play at being nuns ; and I think I wanted to be one, though less so than the other things I have mentioned.

Teresa was about fourteen when her mother died. Though she had been fond of reading romantic tales she ' never wasted her time on them.' This Teresa and her brothers and sisters apparently did. They found out where these books were kept and devoured them greedily, careful not to let their

father see them thus wasting time. His library consisted of those 'good books' Teresa told us about and those she read too. But not long after her mother's death she began to be interested in her appearance, her clothes, her hair, her hands, which were small and beautiful; she saw much of some cousins who were worldly and whose influence her father liked so little that he sent her to be educated at the Augustinian convent in Avila. Here she made friends with Sor Marie Briceño, the nun in charge of the girl visitors to the convent.

'How well she used to speak of God!' Teresa writes; 'for she was a person of great discretion and sanctity . . . there was never a time when I was not glad to listen to her. She would speak of the reward our Lord gives to those who forsake all things for His sake. This good companionship began to root out the habits which bad companionship had formed and to bring my thoughts back to the desire of eternal things as well as to banish in some measure the great dislike I had to be a nun, which had been very great . . . My heart was now so hard that I could not shed a tear even if I read the Passion through. This was a grief to me.'

The gift of tears was valued in those days. But at the end of eighteen months, this introspective girl became overwrought. She was not merely emotional; it went deeper than that; she was in grave doubt as to what she should do. She did not really wish to be a nun, she did not wish to marry. And the strain and tension of her divided life made her ill. She was taken home, and when convalescent set out to visit a step-sister of whom she was very fond. On the way she stayed for a few days with a brother of her father's, Don Pedro de Cepeda. She found he was interested in the same things as Marie Briceño.

Him too our Lord was preparing for Himself. . . . His practice was to read good books in Spanish and his ordinary conversation was about God and the vanity of the world.

These books he made me read to him, and although I did not much like them I pretended I did. Though I remained here but a few days, yet through the impression made on my heart by the words of God both heard and read and by the good conversation of my uncle I came to understand the truth I had heard in my childhood, that all things are as nothing, the world vanity and passing rapidly away. I also began to be afraid that if I were then to die, I should go down to hell. Though I could not bend my will to be a nun, I saw that the religious state was the best and safest. And thus little by little I resolved to force myself to it.

The books her uncle asked her to read to him were the *Morals* of Gregory the Great—her own copy of which is still preserved by the nuns of Avila—and the *Epistles* of S. Jerome which had a decisive influence on her life. At the beginning she was led, like Angela of Foligno, by fear of the future rather than by love of God.

The struggle lasted three months. I used to press this reason against myself : the trials and sufferings of living as a nun cannot be greater than those of purgatory and I have well deserved to be in hell. It is not much to spend the rest of my life as if I were in purgatory and then go straight to heaven—which was what I desired. I was more influenced by servile fear than by love, to enter religion. The devil put before me that I could not endure the trials of the religious life because of my delicate upbringing. I defended myself against him by alleging the trials which Christ endured and that it was not much for me to suffer something for His sake ; besides, He would help me to bear it. . . . I endured many temptations during these days. I was subject to fainting fits, attended by fever—for my health was always weak. I had become by this time fond of good books and that gave me life. I read the *Epistles of S. Jerome* which filled me with so much courage that I resolved to tell my father of my purpose—which was almost like taking the habit, for I was so jealous of my word that I would never for any consideration recede from a promise when once my word had been given.

Thus Teresa deliberately burned her boats. She dreaded the convent ; yet she felt that that sacrifice was demanded of her and her eager spirit

burned to do something for God. She knew that if she once pledged herself she could never draw back and the conviction that all things are as nothing—*que era todo nada*—had begun to take that hold of her which was to last all her life.

Teresa was her father's favourite ; after she and her friends had pled with him in vain, she realized that he would never give his consent. But she had pledged her word. She had already persuaded her brother Antonio to become a friar, and so very early one morning, November 2, 1535, these two set out, he for the Dominican monastery, she for the Carmelite convent of the Encarnacion.

There were then about a hundred and eighty nuns in that convent. They were not enclosed and they lived under the Mitigated Rule. It was the fashion for the young ladies of Avila to go there ; the convent was the only career open to a girl who did not marry, and many embraced it who had no vocation. They found the life not insupportable considering that in the *locutorio*, or parlour, where they were allowed to receive their friends, they heard and discussed all that went on in Avila, in Spain, in Europe, and that New World so lately discovered and in which Teresa's brothers were to seek their fortunes.

Teresa herself was not conscious of vocation ; she was thinking, she tells us, of the salvation of her soul and she felt bitterly the sorrow of leaving her father ; she had no love of God to destroy her love of kindred and so this latter love came upon her ' with a violence so great that if our Lord had not been my keeper, my resolution would have failed me.'

But having once made the great step a certain peace descended on Teresa. She was only twenty years old but the strength of purpose which distinguished her life was already there. ' Better

break than bend,' was one of her principles. Though she was forcing herself to this life, yet she was 'filled with joy so great that it never failed her.' Everything in religion was a delight to her. She used to sweep the house in the hours she had before spent on amusing herself, and 'remembering that she was now delivered from such follies she was filled with a new joy that surprised her nor could she understand whence it came.' She was often found fault with when she was blameless, a thing particularly galling to one of her temper, and she allows she bore it with imperfection, 'however I went through it all because of the joy I had in being a nun.'

We see at this time the emergence in her of that compassion—exercised towards a nun dying of a painful illness — which though at first possibly emotional was to develop from compassion for others to compassion for Christ, to a desire to share in His sufferings. She thought much of the loneliness of Christ, of the insults He suffered at the hands of heretics, the neglect and contempt He suffered from lukewarm Christians, and so there grew up in her that noble conception of life as a compensating sacrifice. She did not believe in self-destructive austerities, but in the strain and tension of her spiritual experiences, in her life of constant ill health, her troubles with ecclesiastical and civil powers, her long journeys in primitive carts over desert mountains and across torrid plains, there was little about suffering she did not know. She did not only accept it ; she welcomed it with joy ; she offered it as a redemptive sacrifice.

Suffering alone can make life tolerable to me. My greatest desire is to suffer. Often and often I cry out to God from the depth of my soul : Lord ! either to suffer or to die is all I ask of Thee !

Yet, as she wrote in the *Interior Castle*, though her thirst for the Infinite sometimes made her long to die and be in safety, her love made her wish to live in order to serve God.

But this, as Teresa would say, is a digression. Let us go back to the Encarnacion. Though the life was not strict, the change in food and habits combined with her own intensity, were too much for her. As there was no vow of enclosure, her father took her away to stay with her step-sister, and on the way she again spent a few days with Uncle Pedro. This time he gave her a copy of Francisco de Osuna's *Tercer Abecedario*, a book which had appeared in Toledo in 1527. It had a profound influence on Teresa's life, for she found in it a description of that recollection which leads to real prayer.

> I did not know how to make my prayer nor how to recollect myself. I delighted in that book exceedingly and determined to follow the way of prayer it described with all my might.

Teresa had already advanced some way in contemplative prayer but she had found no confessor who understood her and was not to do so till Fathers of the Company of Jesus came to Avila twenty years later. But she found in Osuna's book a foundation on which to commence the building of that ' solid house of prayer ' she afterwards achieved. In this winter of convalescence she had time to reflect and practise that exact self-analysis for which she had such genius and which makes her still the classic authority on mystical prayer. At the end of her stay she was able to write :

> Our Lord began to comfort me so much in this way of prayer as in His mercy to raise me to the prayer of quiet and now and then to that of union though I understood not what either the one or the other was. . . . It is true that the prayer of union

lasted but a short time ; I know not if it continued for the space of an *Ave Maria* ; but the fruits of it remained. . . .

I used to labour with all my might to imagine Jesus Christ our Good and our Lord, present within me . . . this was the way that I prayed. . . . My soul was as much afraid to pray without a book as if it had to fight against a host. . . . I collected my thoughts with a book and, using it as a decoy, kept my soul in peace, very frequently by merely opening the book—there was no necessity for more.

But her health grew worse ; she underwent some barbarous treatment which all but killed her ; then she was taken home and after a crisis during which she lay for four days in a trance, so despaired of that her grave was dug, she recovered. Though ' bent together like a coil of ropes,' she was, at her own request, carried back to the convent. She remained delicate all her life, suffering from some stomach trouble, from attacks of what she calls ' double quartan ague,' as well as from heart and nervous affections. It was three years before she was able to go about, and while she was in the infirmary she was never alone, which was a great trial to her. The nuns thought her patient and marvelled at her fortitude in refusing to listen to the tittle-tattle of the convent. ' Still so young and yet so devout ! ' they exclaimed. But Teresa was under no delusions as to her own state. She loved the world and she loved the life of prayer. On one side God was calling her, on the other the world, and she did not know how to reconcile the two.

I passed nearly twenty years on this stormy sea, falling and rising but rising to no good purpose seeing that I fell again. When I was in the midst of the pleasures of the world, the remembrance of what I owed God made me sad and when I was praying to God my worldly affections disturbed me. . . . My soul was now grown weary and the miserable habits it had contracted would not suffer it to rest though it was desirous of doing so. . . . Then one day before a representation of Christ most grievously wounded, I threw myself on the ground,

my tears flowing plenteously, and implored Him to strengthen me once for all that I might never offend Him more. . . . I was now very distrustful of myself, placing all my confidence in God. This was my method of prayer; as I could not make reflections I used to find myself the better of thinking of those mysteries of His life during which He was most lonely. It seemed to me that being alone and afflicted must needs permit me to come to Him.

Teresa's life at the convent was not austere; she had two cells, an oratory below with the little cell where she slept above, and she was allowed to decorate them with pictures. In the *locutorio* she received her friends, and as she was a good talker and had a sparkling wit, she had many visitors. From her windows she looked out on a wide world. 'It profited me to see fields, water, and flowers; in these things did I find a memory of the Creator; they aroused and tranquillized me and were as books.'

In 1544 her father died. Teresa was allowed to go and nurse him, and it was then she met his confessor, the Dominican Vincente Baron. 'He did me a great service,' she says. Conceiving herself unworthy to attempt mental prayer, she had given it up; he told her she must never omit it and ordered her to go to Holy Communion once a fortnight, an unusual frequency for that time. It was probably Fray Baron who introduced her to the *Life of S. Catharine of Siena*, lately written by a Spaniard, and in these years she also came to know the *Imitation* and the four great volumes of her beloved *Cartujano* as she called the *Life of Christ* by the Carthusian, Ludolf of Saxony. It is probable that she also knew the writings of Angela of Foligno.[1]

But the greatest influence of this time was when,

[1] See p. 84.

in 1554, the *Confessions* of S. Augustine were given to her.

> When I began to read the *Confessions* I thought I saw myself there described. . . . When I came to his conversion and read how he heard that voice in the garden it seemed to me nothing less than that our Lord had uttered it for me.

Sometimes now when she was reading, a 'feeling of the presence of God would come over her unexpectedly, so that she could in no wise doubt either that He was within her or that she was wholly absorbed in Him.' This made her more and more aware of her own unworthiness, 'for in a room into which the sunlight enters strongly not a cobweb can be hid'; she began to feel she could not bear to receive so much and give nothing in return.

The following year, 1555, was a decisive one. Two Jesuit Fathers were sent to Avila to found there a house of the Company of Jesus. It was through Don Francisco de Salcedo, that *Caballero Santo* who was to befriend her all her life, that a meeting between Teresa and Fray Juan de Padranos was arranged. Teresa, who hated to be conspicuous, could not bear the nuns to know that so holy a man as a member of the Company of Jesus was coming specially to speak to her. She was nicely mortified, for when Padranos arrived at the Encarnacion, a nun was there who speedily spread the news over the whole convent. Teresa and her spiritual experiences were of course of deep interest to her fellow nuns, and there was a growing belief in Avila that the Encarnacion housed a saint. Repugnant as this must have been to Teresa, her reform would hardly have been possible if by the time she began it she had not already had this reputation.

In the Jesuits Teresa met confessors who understood her. It was under their influence that she

first conceived the practical bearing of her spiritual life. To her eager spirit, little drawn to sentimentalism, the manly and militant Ignatian conception of the spiritual life was deeply attractive. It was Padranos who taught her that prayer and mortification must mutually complement each other ; that there was, and especially for Teresa, a vital connection between subjection of body and freedom of spirit. It would not be surprising to learn that he led her by way of the *Spiritual Exercises* though she nowhere clearly says so. Francis Borgia, who also visited her, assured her that the Spirit of God was working in her ; that she must freely give herself up to it and offer no resistance. All the advice she now received was ' prudent and gentle,' and after her long seeking alone in the wilderness she seems to have advanced swiftly to that tranquil and creative state of prayer in which her work was done. ' My prayer began to be solid like a house,' she says.

In the next five years she experienced many ecstasies and raptures. Much has been written about them and we need not dwell on them here. They were the outward sign of that intense realization of the Divine from which she drew all her strength and which explains her achievements. An experience in which she was aware of the presence of Christ leads her to tell us that ' He seemed to be by my side continually . . . a witness of everything I did . . . never at any time if I was but slightly recollected . . . could I be ignorant of His presence.'

Many thought she was deluded by the devil. Fray Baltasar Alvarez, who directed her after Padranos left Avila, was troubled about her experiences ' for he was not himself led by that way.' His position was difficult because the Inquisition,

that guardian of orthodoxy, was suspicious of anything unusual, and poor Teresa and her life of prayer seem to have been freely and generally discussed.

Alvarez ordered her to resist her visions, to make a sign of scorn when she saw them. 'It was a most painful thing,' she laments, 'to make a show of contempt whenever I saw our Lord in a vision . . . this was to me therefore a heavy kind of penance.' She *knew* these experiences came from God; her directors feared they came from the devil.

'Let me never mistake one thing for another!' cries Teresa. 'I snap my fingers at all the devils. . . . I do not understand these terrors which make us cry out, O the devil! the devil! when we might say O my God! my God! and make Satan tremble. Do we not know that he cannot stir without the permission of God? . . . I am really much more afraid of those people who have so great a fear of the devil than I am of the devil himself. Satan can do me no harm whatever, but they can trouble me very much, especially if they be confessors.'

Yet Teresa never dreamt of questioning the commands of her directors; obedience was one of her great virtues, and it was rewarded. For the more she resisted her visions, the more her graces multiplied. 'I never ceased to be in prayer,' she writes, 'even during sleep my prayer seemed to be continuous.'

It was about this time that S. Peter of Alcantara came to Avila, and Teresa had many long talks with 'that great master of the spiritual life.' She reverenced him above all other men and he understood her by reason of his own experience. 'When he saw that I had those very desires which in himself were fulfilled already and also how strong my resolution was, he delighted in conversing with me. . . . To a person whom our Lord has raised

to this state, there is no pleasure or comfort equal to that of meeting another whom He has begun to raise in the same way.' This friendship was a strength to Teresa, who believed that even after his death S. Peter helped and advised her.

It was not till 1560, as a middle-aged nun of forty-five, that Teresa saw her vocation open up before her. Even then all that was clear was that she could no longer endure the soft existence of the Encarnacion. Talking it over with two friends, she conceived the idea of founding a convent in which the Primitive Rule might be kept. She had no money, she was racked with pain and fever, but such trifles were nothing to one of her temper. She was driven on by a vision of hell—' not bodily tortures but continuous agonizing of soul.' She felt she must live more strictly to escape such spiritual agony, but even more strongly she felt driven to establish a spiritual aristocracy to strive against the errors of the heretics, to atone to Christ for the insults and injuries done Him by the world. She was only a woman, she laments again and again ; she could not go and preach. Her project naturally appeared to her in military form : since the enemy was invading the kingdom and bringing desolation into it, it was necessary that she should collect a band of valiant spirits and enter with them into an impregnable fortress where she could defend the kingdom of her Lord by pure living in an atmosphere of prayer.[1]

Calm, diplomatic, determined, she set to work. Though the Provincial of the Order gave his permission, as soon as news of Teresa's proposal began to leak out, opposition sprang up on all sides. A religious was going to establish a new sort of convent the rule of which would be a reproach to all

[1] See Joly, *S. Teresa*, p. 108.

the other convents in the town! It was to have no revenue; did that mean that the people of Avila would have to support it? The nuns of the Encarnacion took the proposal as an insult to themselves; they said Teresa could serve God as well among them as elsewhere; they thought she ought to be put in prison.

But she held on. The financial problem was solved by her brother Lorenzo, who sent her a timely gift of money. 'As for a poor nun like myself,' she writes, 'who considers it an honour to wear a patched habit, I believe God inspired you to send me so great a sum.' The whole enterprise was carried through in the truest spirit of adventure.

I saw well enough the trouble I exposed myself to, for I was utterly alone and able to do so very little. We agreed that it should be carried on with the utmost secrecy; and so I contrived that one of my sisters who lived out of the town should buy a house and prepare it as if for herself with money which our Lord provided for us. I made a great point to do nothing against obedience. . . . In holding the money, in finding the house, in treating for it, in putting it in order, I had so much to suffer; and for the most part I had to suffer alone. . . . Sometimes in my affliction I used to say: O my Lord, how is it that Thou commandest me to do that which seems impossible?—for though I am a woman, yet, if I were free it might be done; but when I am tied in so many ways, without money, or the means of procuring it—what, O Lord, can I do?

Once when I was in one of my difficulties, not knowing what to do, unable to pay the workmen, S. Joseph, my true father and lord, appeared to me and gave me to understand that money would not be wanting and I must hire workmen. So I did though I was penniless and our Lord . . . provided for me. The house offered me was too small. . . . I did not care now to add to the site by purchase, and so I did nothing but contrive to have it prepared in such a way that it could be lived in. Everything was coarse and nothing more was done to it than to render it not hurtful to health—and that must be done everywhere.

As I was going to Communion on her feast, S. Clare

appeared to me in great beauty and bade me take courage and go on with what I had begun ; she would help me. I began to have a great devotion to S. Clare ; little by little she so perfectly fulfilled my desire that the poverty which the blessed saint observes in her own house is observed in this and we are living on alms.

After many months delay, on S. Bartholomew's Day, August 21, 1562, Teresa gave the habit to 'four poor maidens' as Discalced nuns of the Primitive Order of our Lady of Mount Carmel, 'and the most Holy Sacrament began to dwell in the monastery of our glorious father, S. Joseph.' Though this convent was founded by authority of a papal brief and with the full sanction of the Provincial and Teresa's own confessor, the Prioress of the Encarnacion had not been consulted. Yet Teresa had in no way violated her vow of obedience. Her only desire was to establish in this Gateway of Bethlehem 'great perfection and prayer,' and her advisers had told her she was doing something of value in founding a house of high spiritual ideals.

When the ceremonies were over, Teresa, who had had little rest for several nights, went to her cell. No sooner had she got there than she was told the Prioress of the Encarnacion demanded her immediate return.

All her lofty ideals seemed to tumble about her ears. She began to wonder if she had done right ; if it would be possible for her nuns to be happy in such austerity as she proposed. Darkness and perplexity overwhelmed her. 'Seeing myself in such a plight, I fled to the altar. But the Lord did not let His servant suffer long.' She soon recognized that this depression was 'the devil,' that her desire to serve and suffer for Christ was good and true, that if trials were in store for her,

she would after all be suffering for Him. Making a solemn vow to return to San José as soon as she could, she was again serene and peaceful, 'laughing at the devil though very wearied.'

The priests who had officiated at the ceremonies walked back with her to the Encarnacion where the whole convent assembled to judge the culprit. Teresa was accused of wishing to be much thought of; she was asked to explain her conduct. 'I was perfectly calm,' she says. 'Our Lord helped me and I explained everything in such a way that neither the Provincial nor those present found any reason to condemn me.' She made a deep impression on the Provincial when, turning to him, she said solemnly, 'Beware, Father, of fighting against the Holy Spirit!'

But the turmoil spread. Members of all the religious Orders in Avila met to consider this venture. The city fathers feared it would be a burden on the city; it was a new idea and they were afraid of it. Things were going badly for San José when a young Dominican friar, Domingo Bañez, got up. Though then unknown to Teresa, he was afterwards to be a good friend.

'How is this, señores?' he asked. 'What is the object of this gathering? What foreign enemies threaten these walls? What fire rages through the city? What pestilence consumes it? What famine afflicts it? What ruin is imminent? Can it be that four barefoot nuns—poor, peaceful, virtuous—are the cause of so much commotion in Avila? Give me leave to say that to convoke so solemn a meeting for so slight a cause seems to me lessening the dignity of so grave a city!'[1] It appeared that Teresa had unwittingly broken the law by establishing a convent without the

[1] Cunninghame-Graham, *Santa Teresa*, i. 273.

permission of the civil powers: the irony of Fray Bañez pricked this bubble of obstructive importance. But as Teresa says, it would take too long to relate in detail all the trials the new convent had to pass through. She herself remained tranquil and serene. In the midst of the turmoil she sat down and wrote to a friend, asking for the gift of a bell and missals for the chapel. She had done all she could and she now laid the responsibility elsewhere—'O Lord!' she prayed, 'this house is not mine! It was founded for Thee. I have done all I can for it. Do Thou protect it!'

Finally in Mid-Lent, 1563, Teresa with two nuns of the Encarnacion was allowed to return to San José. Poverty was the rule of the Primitive Carmelites; no nun might possess anything of her own. And so Teresa gave the Prioress of the Encarnacion a receipt for some things she had to borrow—a straw mat, a haircloth with iron links,[1] a scourge, a patched habit. 'With these rich treasures,' says Ribera, 'she set out to inaugurate her unrivalled work of reform.'

Up till now we have been treating with Doña Teresa de Ahumada y Cepeda. But on the way back to San José, she went into the Church of San Vincente to ask a blessing on her new life. Before leaving she took off her shoes and thus re-entered her first convent as the Barefooted Carmelite, Teresa of Jesus the Sinner.

Austere as the life at San José was, its austerity was never driven to extremes; it was a means, not an end. Teresa and her daughters were undertaking this hard life, not for any benefit which might accrue to themselves, but for the good of the world. Teresa believed profoundly in the power of prayer; she also believed that the object of union

[1] a hair-shirt.

with God, what she called the Spiritual Marriage, was work; and the solemn work she proposed to herself and her nuns was to fight sin and heresy by lives dedicated to prayer. Yet knowing the frailty of beings 'fashioned of a little dust,' she provided for variety in their lives; every occupation was however shot through with the atmosphere of prayer. Set apart and freed from the distractions of the world, this little aristocracy of the spirit was yet to perform a real function in it.

The neighbours soon began to regard this humble convent as a centre of holiness; the nuns were not allowed to beg, but food never absolutely failed them. 'As for dinner,' we read in the *Constitutions*, 'we cannot be regular because that must be as the Lord gives. *When we have anything to eat*, the meal shall be in winter at eleven, in summer at ten.' When there was not even a crust in the cupboard some poor neighbour would feel inspired to put two loaves on the *torno*, a revolving wooden arrangement by which things could be taken in or sent out of the convent without contact with the world. Though these nuns kept the Primitive Rule with its prodigious fasts and its absolute poverty, yet 'the sisters thought it light on many points and even added observances of their own to increase its austerity.'

The *Constitutions* included the provision that 'the first on the list of those who are to sweep the house is to be the Mother Prioress, that in all things she may give a good example.' And so Teresa, forced to accept the office of prioress, took part in all the duties; we hear of her being found in ecstasy, the frying-pan in her rigid hands. (Her ecstasies were often thus inconvenient and would come on her unawares in public, much to her distress.) To those who complained of having to

spend time they might have spent in contemplation in menial tasks, she would answer briskly, ' Be not discouraged, my children, for if obedience employs you in outward things, know that even if you are in the kitchen, our Lord moves amidst the pots and pans helping us both within and without.' So that though there were no spare moments at San José, the whirr of the spinning wheel and the sizzle of the frying-pan did not disturb the continuous ascent of prayer for the world. Like Ignatius, Teresa insisted on an almost military obedience ; yet she warned her prioresses against giving orders merely to test the obedience of the nuns ; they were not slaves, she said ; the senses were to be mortified in order that the spirit might be free ; it must not therefore be irritated by foolish and irksome demands.

No discontented or melancholy nun was ever welcome in Teresa's convents. ' Believe me, I dread a discontented nun more than a legion of devils ! ' she exclaimed. ' My only fear is lest they should lose the spirit of joy by which our Lord leads them.' Stupid nuns were nearly as bad—' My God ! preserve us from stupid nuns ! ' was another exclamation provoked by some unfortunate. But Teresa's criterion of ability was ability to obey and accept and worship with joyfulness. Her convents were inspired by her own bracing optimism. She led her nuns by what she called ' the royal road to heaven,' a road which demanded that those who travelled it should be valiant souls, dismayed at nothing.

Teresa had a childlike delight in little things, and this lightness and gaiety in one who had also the other side—the quiet, tranquil, holy joy ; the delighted companionship with her Lord—has something very attractive about it. She would write

gay little verses to celebrate any special occasion, and she and her nuns would sing them to the accompaniment of pipe, drum, tambourine, and castanets. She liked all her daughters to cultivate this spirit of lightsomeness. 'Let each one give us the benefit of her intelligence to-day,' she would say at recreation, 'no one has too much!'

They did not always understand her. There is the story of the nun who was asked to copy some of Teresa's verses and secretly thought them rather foolish. Teresa, divining this, followed her to her cell and said in a motherly way, 'Do not be amazed! In order to endure life, everything is necessary!' To another who had the temerity to reply, when asked to sing, that she thought contemplation would be more fitting, Teresa gave a stern rebuke and sent her to her cell to contemplate at leisure for some days.

None knew better than Teresa the milestones of strain and loneliness and utter despair which mark the spiritual life. But beyond these milestones she saw the goal: that sight kept her in peace even in the midst of turmoil, and she wished to cultivate the same patience, the same vision, in her daughters.

There is a particularly pleasing story about how the nuns, when trying a new kind of loosely woven fabric for their habits, were distressed to discover that it was apt to harbour unwelcome guests. Carrying the Cross before them they went in solemn procession to Teresa's cell to ask her counsel; as they went they chanted the words, *Since Thou hast given us this vesture, O King of heaven, deliver our habits from these insects!* Now Teresa had a love of cleanliness which she apparently never tried to mortify. She did not want her nuns to

be tried in this way, and on this unpromising theme she wrote the following delightful verses which she and her flock sang in alternate verses in procession.

Since Thou dost give us habits new
Great King we urge
Thou may'st from evil gentry free
These robes of serge.

Take courage, daughters, since the Cross
Ye do embrace
And beg of Jesus Christ, your Light,
To grant you grace
And He will be your sure defence
In conflict base.

O Lord! from evil gentry free
These robes of serge!

. . . . .

Since you have come that you may die
Be not afraid
Nor by this gentry's courtesy
Be you dismayed,
For in this combat sore, our God
Will be your aid.

Since Thou hast given us habits new
Great King we urge
That Thou from evil gentry free
These robes of serge.[1]

Teresa's courtesy even to such unwelcome guests reminds us of the feeling of S. Francis for *all* his brothers and sisters, not only for those of the humbler creation naturally dear to us. Her prayers were heard on this occasion, and it is claimed that from that day the habits of the Carmelites were never visited by these insects. Teresa's love of cleanliness comes out again in a

[1] Quoted from E. Allison Peers' *Spanish Mysticism*, p. 107.

letter to Gracian, who was superintending the furnishing of a new convent:

For the love of God, your Paternity, see to it that the beds and table-linen are clean, no matter what it may cost! I could even wish they would make it an article in the Constitutions, for dirt is such a terrible thing!

For five years Teresa stayed quietly in San José. Though they were happy years she was still not satisfied about her spiritual life, and when the Inquisitor of Toledo happened to be in Avila, she 'gave herself up to the Inquisition to try her.' She was told to write an account of her experiences, and that was how the *Life*, from which we have read so many quotations, came to be written. Though it was several times submitted to the Holy Office, no fault was ever found with it. Incorporated in the *Life* is the *Treatise on Prayer* with its famous *Similitude of the Waters*.

The beginner must look upon himself as making a garden wherein our Lord may take His delight, but in a soil unfruitful, abounding in weeds. His Majesty uproots the weeds and will set good plants in their place. . . . With God's help, we have, like good gardeners, to make these plants grow and water them with care so that they die not but rather produce flowers which shall give out great fragrance and so afford refreshment to our Lord.

. . . It seems to me that the garden can be watered in four ways, by taking water from a well . . . or by a water-wheel and buckets . . . or by a stream or brook . . . or by showers of rain when the Lord Himself waters it without any labours of ours. . . .

Of those who are beginning the life of prayer we may say that they are those who draw up the water from the well. This, as I have said, is very laborious, for they have to weary themselves in keeping recollected the senses. . . . To do this is a great labour. Beginners at first advance very painfully because they have not yet completely convinced themselves they are sorry for their sins and yet they are sorry for them just because they are resolved so truly to serve God. . . .

All this is denoted by beginning to draw up water from the well. God grant there may be water to draw! That, however, is not our business; we are concerned to draw it and do what we can towards the watering of the flowers. And God is so gracious that when, for reasons which His Majesty knows . . . He wills that the well should be dry, then if we, like good gardeners, are doing that which in us lies, He Himself preserves the flowers without water and makes our virtues grow.

Well did Teresa know those arduous times when the bucket has to be drawn up by hand and when it comes up dry. 'At such times I laugh bitterly at myself and see clearly my natural misery. I come then to see the exceeding favour of the Lord in that He ever holds this lunatic fast in prayer and holiness.'

When Teresa had written her *Life*, she was commanded by her superiors to write a book of guidance for her nuns, and she called it the *Way of Perfection*. It is a heroic way. 'We cannot stir ourselves to great deeds unless our thoughts are high.' Christ is, for Teresa, the Captain of the soul; He must be served gratuitously as great nobles serve the king, with manly courage. She touches off the little failings of the convent with a sharp but kindly pen; she was much impressed by the 'generous and royal souls' who came to her convents; 'they put me to the blush,' she said, and she did everything in her power to make them happy. 'Remember good views are more requisite than a favourable site,' she wrote to a prioress about to buy a new house. She wished her convents to be small; thirteen was to her the ideal number, though it had often to be stretched. Quiet was what she sought for her nuns. 'Experience has taught me what a houseful of women is like. God preserve us from such a state!' She did not think it possible that the

prioress or confessor of a large convent could know each individual nun sufficiently to guide her.

Your Reverence made me smile by saying that you could tell her character by seeing her. We women are not so easily known !

Like S. Hildegard and S. Catharine of Siena, Teresa corresponded with all sorts of people, and it is in her *Letters* she most fully reveals herself. Living a contemplative life of infinite demand, building up and guiding a new Order, writing books which still remain classic authorities, she was yet able to take the deepest interest in the affairs of those to whom she wrote. She was 'facing everything, forgetting nothing, neither the interests of heaven nor those of earth, even busying herself joyfully with the little postulants who to her mind did not laugh often enough or only with lips pursed up—which she could in no wise endure. Her brother Lorenzo had bought an estate. She could not understand why, absorbed as he was with contemplation and penance, he should neglect his children's fortune. "Jacob," she wrote to him, "did not cease to be a saint for minding his flocks." '[1]

If any disaster or illness happened to her correspondent, Teresa would write, 'Our Lord seems treating you like a valiant soul!' And when Seville was threatened by the Moriscos she congratulated her nuns there that they had a good prospect of becoming martyrs. To a worried and ailing prioress she wrote :

If you would sometimes believe what I say we should avoid a great deal of trouble. . . . Take no notice of the interior troubles you mention ; the greater they are, the more you ought to despise them. They arise from a strong imagination and a disordered body, and the devil seeing this contributes

[1] Joly, op. cit., p. 197.

his share. . . . For the love of God, get well, eat enough and do not be alone or think much. Occupy yourself with what you can and how you can. I wish I were with you, I should have a number of amusing tales to tell you !

Such bracing letters abound and they were often written late into the night by one who was herself ill, persecuted, lonely, desolate. She had no patience with fussy piety—' Lord ! save us from silly devotions ! ' she wrote—nor with nuns who thought they had revelations and fancied themselves as ecstatics. For one such nun whose confessor encouraged her, Teresa prescribed a humbling but sensible régime ; her penances were reduced, she was made to sleep more and eat more, and with the help of these remedies she was cured. But on the other side read the kindly understanding letter she wrote to a novice whose great renunciation had not brought her peace and who was genuinely troubled.

What tempts your Reverence to think you are making no progress will, on the contrary, be of the greatest benefit to you as time will show. God is treating you as one who dwells in His palace and whom He knows will never leave it. . . . I thank Him because you are growing in interior virtues. Let God do as He wills with your soul His bride. He will render good account of it and will lead it by the way that suits it. The novelty of the life and its practices may seem to have destroyed your peace ; later on all blessings will come together. Do not trouble on that account. Glory in helping God to bear the Cross and do not be eager for delights. Mercenaries are paid day by day. Serve without pay as nobles fight for an earthly king and may the King of heaven be with you !

Teresa's own training had been long and arduous, but from the time when she attained victory over her interior conflict she entered on a period of extraordinary fruitfulness in every direction. Her mystical experiences exercised the learned men of

her day; yet after strict examination they were bound to admit that in her they were dealing with one who had attained to that real fellowship with God which Christ promises to those who keep His commandments. Her humility was as great as her faith. She implored God not to forget that the soul on which He was bestowing such blessings had been an abyss of sin. She contrasted the bliss she felt with the place she deserved in hell. 'I was filled,' she says, 'with a new reverence for God. I saw His majesty and power in a way I cannot describe, and the vision kept me in great tenderness and joy and humility. . . . I knew at that great moment what it is for a soul to be in the very presence of God Himself.'

The test of such experiences lies in their results. The glorious thing about Teresa is that at the very period when her mystical life was at its height, her active life was at its height too. The mystical side in no way hindered the other. Rather was it her deep certitude of being guided and supported by the Supreme Power that made her active life possible. Her whole being was transformed in this knowledge of the Indwelling Presence. And it has to be remembered that Teresa never allowed her spiritual intuitions to interfere with her obedience to her Superiors or her Church. As Baron von Hügel pointed out, 'though she believed she had received direct revelations and though she hoped her nuns might receive the same,' such revelations were never to come between the soul and its obedience. 'Rather was the genuineness of the revelation, or at least the right use of it, to be measured by increased obedience, selflessness, love of enemies, suffering. . . .' [1]

When Teresa left the Encarnacion, she was dis-

[1] Von Hügel, *Selected Letters*, p. 302.

tressed at thus severing herself from the Carmelite Order. And soon she began to feel the difficulty of having no priest to direct her nuns who was himself living the life they attempted. When in 1567 Fray Rubeo, the General of the Carmelite Order, came to Avila, Teresa discussed the whole question with him. Deeply impressed by this spiritual venture, Rubeo was loath that it should be lost to the Order and so he offered to receive Teresa and her Reform into it, an offer she joyfully accepted. He urged her to found as many convents as there were hairs on her head, and a few months later consented to her founding two monasteries for friars.

It was at the foundation of her second house in Medina that she met the friar afterwards known as S. John of the Cross. She wrote that she had found two friars, 'or at least one and a half,' eager to adopt the Primitive Rule. John of the Cross was slight and fragile; Fray Antonio large and portly. Yet knowing Teresa and knowing John of the Cross, it seems likely that he was to her the whole man. She reverenced him, 'this man of heavenly goodness small in stature but great before God,' this 'father of her soul' who understood her spiritual life, whose own soul was transformed in God.

The first house of the Discalced Friars was founded at Duruelo in 1568. Antonio told Teresa he had provided some necessary things. 'It was little enough,' she writes, 'he had provided only hour-glasses of which he had five and that amused me much.' It is interesting to remember that she made the habit of John of the Cross with her own hands.

It was the first Sunday in Advent, 1568, that the first Mass was said in that little porch of Bethlehem. . . . As I went

into the church I was amazed to see the spirit which our Lord had inspired there. . . . I can never forget one little cross of wood by the holy water to which a picture of Christ on paper was fastened. . . . The choir was the garret, which was lofty in the centre so that they could say the office in it, but they had to stoop very low to enter it and hear Mass. . . . I understood that when Matins were over they did not go back to their cells till Prime but remained here in prayer, in which they were so absorbed that they went and said Prime when the time came having their habits covered with snow, but they did not know it.

Fortunately for us Teresa was ordered to write the story of her foundations. She was not grateful for the order at the time ; tired, ill, overburdened with work, she heard a voice say to her, ' Obedience gives strength ! ' and ' experience,' she said, ' had shown her the great blessing it was for a soul never to withdraw from obedience.' Yet written in weariness, what a book she has given us ! Less well known than her other books, the *Foundations* is the most genial and sparkling of them all. Though it does not profess to treat of spiritual things, its whole atmosphere is radiant ; it proves how a soul that is rightly oriented can deal with aggravations and disappointments in people and things, and yet remain steadfastly in peace. Teresa writes as she must have talked ; spontaneous and sparkling, all that is in her mind comes gushing out just as if she were speaking to us with her genius for graphic words, her happy turn of humour. These spirited accounts of her travels are worthy of Cervantes, her great contemporary.

In giving an account of these foundations I do not speak of the great hardships of travelling in cold, heat, and snow. Once it snowed the whole day long, at other times we missed our road, and again I had sicknesses and fever ; for, glory be to God, my health is generally weak, but I saw clearly that our Lord was giving me strength. . . . So far as I remember at present I never refrained from making a foundation through

fear of trouble, though I felt a great dislike to journeys, specially long ones ; but when I had once started I thought nothing of them, looking to Him in whose service they were undertaken and calling to mind that our Lord would be praised and that the most Holy Sacrament would dwell in the house I was going to found. It is a special joy to me to see one church more, when I consider how many the Lutherans are destroying.

For twenty years Teresa travelled the plains and crossed the Sierras. She generally had a retinue of nuns and priests with her. Sometimes they rode, sometimes they drove in little tented carts. The roads were far from safe, infested by brigands and desperadoes, yet this elderly and ailing nun was dismayed at nothing. Before setting out the whole party received Holy Communion and once on the road the Hours were kept just as in the convent. Teresa travelled with an image of the Christ-child in her arms, a holy water stoup, a crucifix, and a leather water-bottle beside her.

When the night had to be spent in an inn or *venta*, Teresa would take a room for herself and her nuns, if there was one ; but often there was nothing but the one dark cavern for travellers and their mules ; a mud floor, a fire in the centre, the smoke escaping through a hole in the roof, ' the misery of the roads and the weather was nothing to the intolerable misery of fleas and dirt within.' [1] We hear of the party finding the inn itself impossible and spending the night thankfully in the granary where a lizard alarmed Teresa by running up her arm ' between the flesh and the tunic.'

She had no definite plan as to her foundations ; she went wherever she was called. The fame of the life at San José soon brought requests to found other houses in different parts. Sometimes an

[1] Cunninghame-Graham, op. cit., ii. 349.

aristocrat would provide house and money ; sometimes novices would bring dowries; sometimes Teresa had not even a *blanca* and yet what was necessary was always forthcoming. The resource and optimism of the *Madre Fondadora* was the chief asset.

The story of her second foundation at Medina is characteristic. It was made possible by a young woman who had wished to be received at San José but for whom there was no room. She had a little money, enough to rent a house for a short time and to pay for the journey. With these slender means Teresa, two nuns from San José, four from the Encarnacion and their chaplain, Julian of Avila, set out. Teresa had asked a friend to inquire about a house in Medina and a lady there had agreed to sell the community a house, fortunately asking for no security. Let us read Teresa's story :

The first day's journey brought us late at night to Arevalo, worn out by the difficulties of the road. As we were drawing near to the town one of our friends, an ecclesiastic . . . came to meet us and told me secretly that the house was not to be had because it was close to that of the Augustinian friars who would resist our taking possession and that we should be forced to go to law.

O my God, how poor is all opposition when Thou, O Lord, art pleased to give us courage ! This seemed rather to encourage me, for I thought, seeing that the devil was beginning to be troublesome, our Lord would take pleasure in the monastery. Nevertheless I asked the priest to keep silence and not to trouble my companions. . . .

When we had reached our lodgings I found that a Dominican friar was in the place, who used to be my confessor . . . the master Fray Domingo Bañez, a man of great learning and discretion. . . . To him it did not seem that what I was going to do was so difficult as it seemed to everybody else, for the more God is known, the more easy it is to do His work ; so he thought it all quite possible because of certain graces which he knew His Majesty had bestowed on me and because of the things he had seen during the founding of S. Joseph's. It

was a great joy to me to see him, for under his direction I thought everything would prosper. . . . He thought we might quickly settle with the Augustinians ; any delay, however, was irksome to me because I did not know what to do with so many nuns ; and thus we all spent that night in trouble. . . .

The next morning the prior of our Order, Fray Antonio, arrived ; he told us that the house he had agreed to buy was large enough and that it had a porch wherein a small church might be made by adorning it with hangings. That we resolved to do, for the least delay was the best for us because we were away from our monasteries, and moreover I was afraid of some opposition . . . so I wished to take possession before our arrival became known.

We arrived in Medina del Campo at midnight on the eve of our Lady's feast in August, alighted at the monastery of S. Anne, so as to occasion no disturbance, and went on foot to the house. It was a great mercy of our Lord that we were met by no one for they were at that hour shutting in the bulls that were to run next day. . . . Having reached the house we entered a court. The walls seemed to me very ruinous but not so much then as afterwards by daylight. It was our Lord's pleasure, it seems, to make the blessed father blind to the unseemliness of reserving the most Holy Sacrament in such a place.

It was now well after midnight and the convent was to be consecrated at daybreak. The hangings Teresa had brought were useless considering the length of the porch and she began to despair. ' But it was our Lord's pleasure the chapel should be ready and the altar erected.' The steward of the lady to whom the house belonged produced—in the middle of the night !—some pieces of tapestry and a length of blue damask. But there were no nails to nail them up with ! Nothing daunted Teresa and her nuns set to work to examine the walls and pull or prise out every nail they could find. At last with some trouble they got enough ; some began to hang the tapestry, some to wash the floor, so that by daybreak the altar was ready, the little bell hung, Mass was said, and the Holy

Sacrament reserved. Teresa's joy was great but soon dispelled, for when daylight came and she went to look at the court through the window, she saw that the walls were so ruinous that the chapel was open to the street. 'O my God! what anguish of heart was mine when I saw His Majesty in the street in times so full of peril because of these Lutherans!'

But soon a merchant took pity on them and lent them the top storey of his house till the convent walls were repaired. So it was always with Teresa's foundations; nothing seems to have daunted her and yet she had her bad days.

Sometimes it seems to me . . . I am full of courage and that I would not turn my face away from anything which was for God's service. Another day comes and I find myself so destitute of it as to be unable to kill an ant for God's sake if it offered any resistance.

By 1570 six convents of the Reform had been founded, and Teresa was asked by the Jesuits to make a foundation in Salamanca. She set out with one nun expecting to find a house ready for her. Instead of that she found only bare walls and dirt.

My companion and I were alone the night of All Souls. I have to tell you one thing, my sisters, at which I am ready to laugh when I think of it. . . . We shut ourselves up in a room wherein the straw was placed, that being the first thing I provided for the founding of the house, for with straw we could not fail to have a bed. My companion . . . was afraid and Satan must have helped her to imagine dangers for the purpose of troubling me, for, owing to the weakness of the heart from which I suffer, very little is enough to do it. I asked her why she was looking about. . . . She replied, 'Mother! I am thinking if I were to die now what you would do alone?' . . . I answered her, 'Sister! when that shall happen, I will consider what I shall do. Now let me go to sleep.'

From Salamanca Teresa was suddenly called away by a most unexpected event. She was

made Prioress of the Encarnacion ! That convent had fallen into such spiritual and material destitution that the Provincial thought no one but Teresa could pull it straight. And so, without consulting the nuns, he appointed her. It was a trying position. Teresa had left the Encarnacion because its ideals were not hers. She was now ordered to go back and rule it, to leave the little convents she had so laboriously founded with no one yet trained to look after them and from whose inmates she found it so difficult to tear herself away.

The leaving my daughters and sisters . . . was my greatest Cross, especially when . . . I perceived their sad resentment thereof and their tears ; for though they were weaned from all other things, our Lord had not given them this ; perhaps that it might be a greater torment to me ; for methought neither was I weaned from them.

The Provincial went with Teresa to introduce her to her old convent which she had left barely ten years before. The nuns, fearing the severity of her rule and indignant because they had not been consulted about the election, received her with open revolt. But when in the morning they went into the chapter-room they saw in the stall of the Prioress a statue of our Lady, the keys of the convent in her hands. At her feet sat Teresa.

' Señoras, my mothers and sisters,' she said, ' our Lord has sent me to this house to undertake my office by order of obedience. . . . I come solely to serve and comfort you in every way I could. . . . I am a daughter of this house and your sister and I know the state and needs of all, or of the greater number of you, so there is no reason why you should hold aloof from one who is so wholly yours. You need not fear my rule, for though hitherto I have lived among and governed Discalced Nuns, by the mercy of God, I know how others should be ruled.'

Under Teresa the Encarnacion became as devout as her own convents. ' It is my Prioress who works

these wonders,' she wrote. She had summoned S. John of the Cross to her aid and he worked there as chaplain and confessor till he was imprisoned by the conservative party. After Teresa had set the Encarnacion on a firm footing she was allowed to return to her own Reform.

It was while making a foundation at Veas that she met Father Gracian, the support of her latter years and in a way her successor. She was then sixty; like S. Francis, she saw her Order growing beyond her control, and while thinking of this she had a vision of His Majesty with Gracian on His right. 'And He said to me that He would have me accept him in His place for my whole life.'

Gracian was a gentle young priest belonging to the Reform, a theologian, a diplomat, and an orator whose gifts made him of the greatest use to the Order in the troubles about to break over it.

'I assure you,' Teresa wrote to a prioress, 'that even now I have not fathomed his worth. To my eyes he is perfect. . . . What your Reverence and all of us must do is to beseech God to give him to us for our Superior. At last I shall be able to take some repose from the management of these houses.'

The unreformed or Mitigated Carmelites had long been jealous of Teresa's Reform, and from 1575 for four years this jealousy assumed the character of active warfare. In 1577 John of the Cross was seized at the Encarnacion and imprisoned; he contrived first to tear up Teresa's letters to him that she might not be incriminated; the most important he is said to have swallowed. This explains why none of Teresa's letters to him have come down to us. And Gracian, going to see Teresa one day, was terrified to see the carts of the Inquisition at the convent door; it was being searched. But Teresa laughed at his fears. 'Well and good, Father! let them burn us all for Christ's

sake, but never fear lest any of us should err from the Faith, for by God's grace we would rather die a thousand times ! '

Teresa herself was ordered to Toledo and virtually imprisoned there for some months. It is pleasing to find that in the code she and her friends used in case their letters should fall into the hands of their enemies, members of the Mitigated Order are referred to as the ' cats ' or the ' owls.'

Finally after four years' persecution, during which Teresa fought valiantly for her Order, using her influence both with Pope and King, the latter insisted that the persecution of the Reform should cease. It was then created into a separate Province, thus protecting it for ever from outside government and safeguarding the work of Teresa's life.

Gracian was appointed Provincial, and Teresa now virtually handed over the reins to him. She wrote him long letters of advice on everything connected with the Order, from the spiritual problems of the nuns to the quality of their stockings, from legal difficulties about new property to particulars about a kitchen stove. Though she had made Gracian a vow of obedience and addresses him as *Your Paternity* her letters are full of teaching as well as solicitude.

I have a strange character ! When I saw that you left me at Toledo regardless of my desire to leave that place, I was delighted and feel the freer in expressing my wishes and opinion since you make no account of them. . . .

That prayer is the most acceptable which leaves the best results. Results I mean in actions. That is true prayer. Not certain gusts of softness and feeling and nothing more. For myself, I wish no other prayer but that which improves me in virtue. I would fain live more nearly as I pray. I count that to be a good prayer which leaves me more humble,

even if it is still with great temptations, tribulations, aridities. For it must never be thought that because a man has much suffering, therefore he cannot have prayed acceptably. His suffering is as incense set before God. Tell my daughters that they must work and suffer as well as pray, and that it is the best prayer that has with it the most work and the most suffering. . . .

I do not know where you got the brains for such tact and address ! Blessed be He who endowed you with them for it is clearly His doing. Let Your Paternity be careful to remember this and not become self-confident. . . . How prosy I am ! . . . I am afraid that the little mule is not suited to Your Paternity and think it would be well for you to buy a good one. . . . My only fear is lest a mount should be chosen that would unseat my Father and I am not so frightened of your falling off a little mule. Your Paternity must consider what is best. But do not be so low-spirited for it is killing me ! May God protect and make you as holy as I ask of Him. . . . Pray much for me because I am very old and worn-out, although my desires are vigorous. . . .

It was during the years of trouble with the Mitigated Order that at Gracian's request Teresa wrote the *Interior Castle*—sometimes known as the *Moradas* or *Mansions*. No trace of the anxieties through which she was passing appears in this book which she herself considered her best. It was written in the early mornings and late evenings of four weeks, the rest of which were occupied with the urgent affairs of the Order. And it was written in a firm hand with few erasures. A nun who had to go to her cell at this time wrote, ' I entered to deliver a message and found her so absorbed that she did not notice me. Her face seemed quite illuminated and most beautiful. After having listened to me she said : " Sit down, my child, and let me write what our Lord has told me ere I forget it," and she went on writing with great rapidity and without stopping.' [1]

[1] *Interior Castle*, Introduction, p. 12.

Teresa had the unique qualifications for writing on spiritual matters that she was both mystic and psychologist: in this book she describes the various stages of prayer through which the soul must pass before it attains to union with God.

I thought of the soul as resembling a castle formed of a single diamond . . . and containing many rooms just as in heaven there are many mansions. . . . Some are above, some below, others at the side ; in the centre in the very midst of them all is the principal chamber in which God and the soul hold their most secret intercourse.

At the end of the first three stages, or mansions, the soul has progressed through meditation to that state of still recollection known as the prayer of simplicity. From this stage it is increasingly granted that infused or mystical prayer in which God takes possession of the soul. As it progresses through the fourth, fifth, and sixth mansions it is more and more drawn up into God. And in the seventh mansion, which Teresa calls the Spiritual Marriage, God is ever present to the soul. It lives calmly and continuously in Him ; its training is over, it is ready to be used for His purposes.

'Do you know,' she asks, 'what it is to be truly spiritual? It is for men to make themselves the slaves of God, branded with His mark which is the Cross. . . . This is the end and aim of prayer, my daughters, this is the reason of the spiritual marriage whose children are always good works. Works are the unmistakable sign which shows that these favours come from God. . . . Do not build towers without a foundation, for our Lord does not care so much for the importance of our works as for the love with which they are done.

To this state of calm and continuous peace Teresa had now come. But that peace was indeed a 'rest most busy.' She had now founded fifteen convents. Anne of Jesus was to carry out the foundation at Granada under her direction, though with self-will which called forth a stern rebuke.

Anne was in fact another Teresa, saintly, broad-minded, strong-willed; but she lacked Teresa's genius as well as her love of obedience. For all that, she was one of Teresa's staunch friends; she was to protect and support the Order after her death and lead it into France.

Teresa was devoted to her friends. She was a lonely woman and she never overcame the longing 'to love and be loved,' though she acknowledges this as a *grandisima falta* in herself. In the midst of an important letter to Gracian she suddenly stops to remind him he has not sent her her Easter egg! She sees plainly that this desire to be remembered does not make for sanctity—and yet, she concedes frankly, 'if any one sent me even a sardine, I would do anything for him!'

'I assure you,' she writes to a prioress, 'that if you love me, I love you in return, and like to hear you tell me so. How natural it is in us to wish for a return! But there can be no harm in that for our Lord has the same desire. . . . Let us resemble Him in some way or other!'

In January, 1582, Teresa set out to make her last foundation at Burgos. She was old and ill, and Gracian came to look after her on the journey, 'it seeming to him that my life was worth somewhat.' Some time before she had broken her arm, she had had a slight shock, and on this journey she contracted a severe sore throat with fever. But such trifles did not long detain this valiant old traveller. The roads were reported to be impassable, bridges were washed away. But assured that her Lord would be with her, Teresa went on. Near Burgos a pontoon bridge was under water.

'Now then, my daughters,' she called out cheerfully, 'what greater privilege do you desire than to become martyrs for the love of God? Hinder me not; for it is my desire to cross first. . . .'

So saying she stepped into the water. She confessed afterwards that she could not but be afraid and that her sore throat and fever had prevented her from enjoying the adventure as much as she would otherwise have done.

Arrived at Burgos, the Archbishop was obstructive, Teresa's throat grew worse. They slept in the attic of a hospital: 'O my Lord! what a luxurious bed is this compared with Thine on the Cross!' Teresa exclaimed when her nuns lamented the miserable lodging of their old Mother.

When at last after many months the foundation was made, Teresa longed to get back to San José. But Gracian asked her to visit Palencia and then Valladolid, journeys which were 'a succession of sufferings.' There was friction with the Prioress at Valladolid, but on leaving Teresa commended the community. Her parting words were, 'My daughters, be diligent to have noble desires; very precious fruit is gathered from them even when they cannot be carried out.'

Free at last to return to San José, another delay came in the form of a request to go to Alba where the young Duchess was expecting a child. Ill as she was, Teresa set out, but was met near Alba with the news that the child had been born. 'God be praised!' she exclaimed with a flash of her old wit; 'the "Saint" will not be needed now!' But she was so tired that she had to be taken into the convent instead of going on to the castle. As her nuns were helping her to bed she confessed to being tired, 'It is more than twenty years since I went to bed so early!'

For a week she struggled on but then one day at Mass she became very ill. By her own wish she was taken up to the infirmary because from its little window she could see the high altar and hear

Mass. On the Eve of S. Francis she asked for the Viaticum. When the Blessed Sacrament was brought to her, 'O my Lord!' she cried out, 'at last the longed for hour has come! It is now time for us to see one another!' And she gave thanks for being a child of the Church. That night she asked for Extreme Unction and from time to time was heard to murmur *Cor contritium et humiliatum, Deus, non despicies*, and softly to whisper the Name of Jesus. Just before she died the nuns heard three very gentle sighs and Teresa had joined the celestial chivalry.

She went to no strange country but, as she had written, to her own native land, since it was that of Him she loved and who loved her.

We cannot here attempt to sum up Teresa's legacy to the world. Her Reform, her Foundations, and her books place her among the creative spirits. But her life was greater than them all; that of a woman who had a great vision and was true to it, whose soul was virile and heroic, who was consciously guided and supported by God, in whom her whole being was transformed, without whom she knew she could do nothing. At the end of one of her prayers we find these words:

Well do I see how little I can do. But now, having drawn near to Thee, having ascended this watch-tower from which Thy truth can be seen, if Thou departest not from me, I can do all things!

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MADAME ACARIE, 1566–1618

THOUGH most of us are familiar with some of the great figures of the religious renaissance which took place in France in the seventeenth century, few English readers know much about Madame Acarie. And yet her house was the centre of the whole movement, she herself ' the magnet towards whom for more than thirty years all who desired the life of the spirit inevitably found their way.' [1]

But if England, then somewhat poor in spiritual personalities, should feel envious at the thought of that amazing efflorescence in France, she has only to reflect that the whole tremendous movement across the Channel owed much of its inspiration to an Englishman. He was called William Fitch, and he was born in the beginning of the reign of Queen Elizabeth, in the little village of Canfield in Essex. He took his name from that village, being known in religion as Benedict Fitch or Canfield. Of independent means, he seems to have been a gay youth. He describes himself as a ' gad-about, a frequenter of schools, not of doctrine but of dancing.' He was converted about middle-age, and soon after that he crossed over to France. He went from a land where monasteries were being suppressed and churches desecrated to one in which he drank in with great contentment the majesty and beauty of the Church. His heart ' thrilled with joy and gladness at the sweet-

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics of the Church*, p. 192.

ness of the singing, the dignified solemnities of the Mass, the candles and torches, the white-robed priests, clerks, and cantors, the solemn processions and the devout worshippers, the raising of whose hearts and voices seemed to signify their readiness to leave the earth and join the angels in Paradise.' [1]

He took the habit as a Capuchin Friar in Paris in 1586. Returning to England in 1589 as a priest, he was imprisoned in the Tower but was released by request of Henri IV, and returned to France, where he lived till his death in 1611. He wrote *A Rule of Perfection* which was used by several generations of mystics. The active and contemplative lives, according to Canfield, cannot be separated ; the active life of a Christian must also be contemplative, his exterior works interior, his physical strivings spiritual, his temporal efforts eternal, ' thus making of the two things one only.' He probably knew the doctrine Ruysbroeck had formulated more than two hundred years earlier : ' Then only is man's life a whole when he is ready alike for contemplation and for action, and is perfectly in both of them at once.'

Though now almost completely forgotten, Canfield was yet ' a master of masters ' ; of Cardinal de Bérulle, Madame Acarie, S. François de Sales, and many others. And it was he ' who gave the religious renaissance of France its distinctively mystic character.' [2]

Of all the great figures who immediately followed Canfield, Mme Acarie comes first, at least as regards personal influence. She comes even before François de Sales ; for one reason, he lived in Geneva

[1] Brémond, *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France*, ii. 152, quoted from *La Vie du R. P. Benoit Anglais*, etc. Brouses, Paris, 1621.

[2] Brémond, op. cit., p. 156.

while she lived in Paris, and her house was for years the centre of the religious life of her time. Her father Nicolas Avrillot was a wealthy aristocrat, Seigneur of Champlâtreux near Luzarches, King's Counsellor, and attached to the *Chambre des Comptes* in Paris. He was a devout Catholic, a member of the Holy League. Her mother, who belonged to one of the oldest Parisian families, was severe to the extent of harshness; and though the father was less so, he was still a stern parent. So that it was not strange that Barbe Avrillot, who was born in Paris on February 1, 1566, grew up timid and self-contained. But although she was always in awe of her parents and later to some extent of her husband, she was not lacking in courage or initiative. She was educated in a convent where one of her aunts was a nun and where she was very happy. She used often to go back there in after life, and she naturally had thoughts of becoming a nun though she was also attracted by the idea of working among the poor. But those were the days of parents! Her mother had no such ideas for her and married her when only sixteen to Pierre Acarie, a wealthy young aristocrat attached, like her father, to the *Chambre des Comptes*, and also, like him, a member of the Holy League, of which his jocular friends called him the Lackey.

Pierre Acarie was an unsatisfactory person. Outwardly punctilious about religious observances, he seems inwardly never to have grown up. He was undisciplined; he was fond and proud of his young wife, but he was criminally extravagant, and when his financial affairs got into a hopeless mess, he depended on her to get him out of it. And yet he was jovial and affectionate; an overgrown, teasing schoolboy with a good opinion of himself and an uncontrollable temper. When it got the

better of him it was recognized that the only thing to do was to send for a certain Jesuit priest who could bring him to reason. The services of this priest seem often to have been required; when, for instance, Mme Acarie was asked to go and advise about the building of a new convent and her husband refused to let her go; or when he allowed his appetite to tempt him too much and got ill from overeating. We hear too of Mme Acarie being hurriedly fetched back from church by one of her servants, because her husband was impatient for his meal. For all that, she was fond of him and when he was in good humour he used to beg her not to treat him with so much respect.

One day he found her engrossed in *Amadis*, a novel a friend had lent her, and there were other novels lying on the table. A stormy scene followed, for M. Acarie did not approve of novels, at least not for his wife. But he realized she must have something to read and so he went to borrow some books from her confessor. He came back with an armful of devotional works. Mme Acarie was then much alone and she read voraciously, as much Duval, her biographer, tells us 'in obedience to her husband and confessor as to please herself.' There might be among these books the new translation of the *Life* of S. Catharine of Genoa, just published in Paris. We know at any rate that Mme Acarie was deeply attracted to this saint, as were Bérulle and François de Sales.

One day her confessor arrived with a book in which he pointed out this passage:

He asks too much to whom God is not sufficient!

These words suddenly broke in on her soul as a flash of revelation. She was suddenly, abruptly, aware that she was different; that everything within her—heart, mind, soul—was utterly changed.

A sudden splendour flooded her soul. She was awakened and made aware of Reality. She was in contact with that Light and Love which were ever after to stream through her and radiate out on those with whom she came in contact. And she was not merely made aware of this supernatural life ; she was henceforth dedicated to its service.

The annals of mysticism furnish us with many similar instances of the abrupt awakening of the supernatural consciousness ; it was equally sudden in Angela of Foligno and S. Catharine of Genoa. Mme Acarie was then twenty-two years old. She had three children ; she was to have three more, a healthy, happy family of robust, high-spirited boys and girls. But from the time of this awakening she was tried for the rest of her life by ecstasies and abnormal states. She was often forced to shut herself up in her room to hide them. Wherever she was, but especially in church, she would, if she allowed herself to meditate on any holy thought, or let her eyes rest on a crucifix, suddenly fall into an ecstasy which might last for hours. Reading spiritual books, reciting her rosary—all these were from that time impossible to her, except in her own room.

Her biographer makes a great deal of these ecstasies ; all Paris delighted to talk of them. But for Mme Acarie herself they were most inconvenient. A horror of being in any way conspicuous, and especially of being conspicuous regarding their inner lives, is characteristic of the saints. Mme Acarie did her best to hide her ecstasies but she could not prevent them from overtaking her. Soon she became aware of the pain of the Stigmata and she is said always to have hidden her hands even from her best friends. She could easily hide the condition of her feet for, owing to accident—she

had broken her ankle three times—and ill health, she could now only walk on crutches.

This is not the place to enter on consideration of Mme Acarie's Stigmata ; such physical manifestations are known to have occurred in those of sensitive nature ; they need not necessarily be called supernatural. In any case they are the accidents accompanying a state of stress when human nature is called on to live a more than human life. Madame Acarie was sensitive and highly strung ; her consciousness of God was so overpowering that it broke down her physical being ; her ecstasies were the price she had to pay for her vivid experience of God but she herself did not attach any importance to them. ' Ecstasies, visions, and revelations,' she said, ' are no proof of the presence of God in the soul. Have we not seen many deceived by such visions ? Although they have been the cause of the conversion or even the salvation of some souls, it is a stratagem of the evil spirit who is willing to lose a little in order to gain much. . . . ' [1]

Duval, whose entire lack of humour makes us smile, tells us solemnly that such ecstasies used to seize Mme Acarie ' even in the presence of her mother-in-law.' That lady insisted on calling in medical advice, to the great distress of her daughter, whose only desire was for privacy and to whom the publicity and talk about her most private affairs must have been a terrible mortification.

The doctors could of course make nothing of her symptoms, but as the patient's face was always flushed at these times, they justified their presence by bleeding her much and often. (Whereas S. Catharine of Genoa was allowed to emerge ' joyous and rosy-faced ' from her encounters with

[1] Duval, *La Vie admirable de . . . Mlle Acarie*, Paris, 1893, p. 112.

her Love!) As a last resort, Benedict Canfield was called in. Without the least hesitation he declared the whole thing to come from God and told Mme Acarie she was 'freely and gladly and without fear to give herself up to these divine visitations.' [1]

But now her husband, hearing on all sides that his wife was gifted with extraordinary graces, began again to seek for suitable books for her to read. Some one told him that Angela of Foligno had been led by the same extraordinary way and so he got her *Consolations* translated into French. But Mme Acarie could not at that time read anything; at the first word of any devotional book her spirit was rapt up to the heights and she was left without human understanding. Her husband could not grasp that. He had taken a great deal of trouble to get this book translated for his wife and now she would not read it! To be just to him, it was a little hard.

He began to get annoyed; to talk about his wife's inconvenient habits. He told her firmly that other young ladies—those who were, moreover, greatly thought of in the town!—did not practise their religion that way. They went quietly to church, had no extraordinary experiences, and troubled no one. Then he complained to the parish priest; and however much we try to sympathize with him, here he alienates our sympathy. One day he was specially insistent that his wife and all the household should go to church. They went obediently, suspecting nothing. But when the priest went up to the pulpit, he launched out into a violent diatribe against those women who indulged in strange experiences, who, under pretext of devotion failed to fulfil their duty to their husbands and households. The preacher then went

[1] Duval, op. cit., p. 25. Also Brémond, op. cit., ii. 195.

on to specify particulars which left no one in any doubt as to the particular case he had in mind.

Imagine Mme Acarie's feelings ! And yet when she got home and her faithful maid exclaimed ' What *has* the Master been saying to our good Father ? ' she only smiled and said, ' We must just let them speak ! It will soon blow over ! ' She was equally uncomplaining when another priest to whom M. Acarie had spoken, refused one day to give her Communion. As Brémond shrewdly remarks, ' If any one in that house cut a poor figure, it was not Madame Acarie ! ' [1]

But we have wasted too much time over such incidents, and must pass on to the life and work of our saint. She was a delicate little lady. She could only walk on crutches and yet she not only attended to all her domestic duties and her children's education, but was deeply engaged in manifold works of charity. Her husband was merely a figurehead ; she had to manage all his affairs because he was too indolent to do so himself. His chief occupation seems to have been the squandering of a large fortune. The downfall of the League found him crippled with debt, and owing to some mysterious political imprudence he was exiled in 1594. Thanks to Henri IV's respect for Mme Acarie, her husband was allowed to stay in France so long as he kept away from Paris.

We need not follow his adventures. For four years he and his wife were forced to live apart, years spent by her partly in trying to retrieve his fortunes, partly in training herself for the work she was to do. In the absence of her husband she was able to practise her religion more strictly ; she spent many hours a day in prayer and practised various austerities ; she was learning the rules of

[1] Brémond, op. cit., ii. 210.

her art. She worked among the poor, overcoming, like the two Catharines, her instinctive shrinking from dirt and disease ; dressing the most terrible wounds with a radiant and smiling face, bringing new hope and courage to those she visited. She cared for their bodies as well as their souls. During a specially hard winter she sent firewood and blankets to many convents, fearing that the nuns would die of cold, and she persuaded her mother-in-law to share with the poor the corn that prudent lady had hoarded for the household.

Her own affairs were in a bad way. A Friar Minor told Duval that once when he was dining with Mme Acarie, Sheriff's officers seized the silver dishes off the table, even the very plate in front of his hostess. And owing to her husband's mysterious imprudence, she had not only to try to pay off his debts but to re-establish his good name, as well as to keep and clothe and educate his six children. But she succeeded both in vindicating his reputation and in re-establishing the family fortunes.

As a mother, Mme Acarie was delightful ; a real companion to her children, always ready to enter into their games. They were encouraged to tell her everything they were doing and thinking ; they felt when she looked at them, that she saw right down into the very depths of their being. She could not tolerate the slightest untruthfulness ; however dreadful the fault they might have committed, ' if you own it,' she said, ' I will forgive you with my whole heart. But I will never forgive the smallest lie.' The whole object of her training was to create humility and obedience, to make her children docile without in the least breaking their spirit.

She had a horror of young people being driven

into religion. 'If I had a hundred children,' she said, 'and was deprived of the wherewithal to start them in life, I would not on my own responsibility put a single one into religion.' She did not even like them to be too serious, thinking that such early gravity was apt to blunt what S. François de Sales called *la fine pointe de l'esprit*. Brémond gives us a delightful picture of the children playing spelicans beside their mother in ecstasy; another of her interrupting an ecstasy to join in their games. 'It is thus,' he says, 'that true mystics reconcile heaven and earth, responding with the same willingness to every voice which calls them, to the most humble as well as the most sublime.'

All Mme Acarie's activities were the result of the solid background of contemplation on which her life was built up. Thus we read:

> She never willingly applied herself to any question without having first felt some interior leading about it. . . . She hardly ever dealt with any one, at least on any important matter, unless with an inward vision, entirely recollected before God; so much so that if this vision failed her, she stopped short, seeming not to know where she was and without caring what those with whom she was dealing might think.[1]

Her nearest duties being so exacting, they might have seemed sufficient for this delicate little lady to undertake, she who had to 'strive even against God Himself in order to retain the use of her head and hands in the accomplishment of her duties.' But, on the contrary, no considerable work of religion or charity was undertaken in Paris during the reign of Henri IV without Mme Acarie's help or advice, while of very many she was herself the leading spirit and organizer. She was the 'conscience of Paris.' Her immediate circle was composed of the leaders of the spiritual life of France,

[1] Duval, op. cit., p. 59; Brémond, op. cit., ii. 224.

drawn irresistibly by Mme Acarie's magnet. 'It is the spiritual Head-quarters' Staff she has gathered around her.' [1]

The head-quarters had been for a time in the home of Pierre de Bérulle, the future Cardinal and founder of the Oratory, for when Pierre Acarie was exiled, Bérulle's mother took Mme Acarie and her children into her house. Bérulle was about ten years younger than Mme Acarie, a grave, silent young man, then about eighteen years of age. Everything of the deepest sort those two had in common. They lived almost as if in a religious community. He spent 'interminable hours' in church (the adjective, needless to say, is not his !) and he was a rapacious reader. His mother and her children supplied the human balance and a large circle of like-minded friends soon gathered round them. Among them was Benedict Canfield who first initiated Bérulle and Mme Acarie into the secrets of contemplative prayer, if indeed any initiation was required for what came instinctively to both. Duval, the grave Doctor of the Sorbonne, was another of their intimates, he who 'never put off his doctor's robes, though they hung on him in graceful folds.' It was Duval who wrote the *Life* of Mme Acarie to which we owe most of what we know about her. De Marillac, afterwards Chancellor of France, was another of those drawn by Mme Acarie's magnet, while S. Vincent de Paul, S. François de Sales, and later Charles de Condren were all associated with this group.

Bérulle's solid sanctity was at once recognized, and even as a young man he was reverenced by his friends. On the practical side, Mme Acarie could not have carried through the difficult and often delicate affairs she undertook in reforming

[1] Brémond, op. cit., iii. 14.

convents and establishing secular communities, had she not had his assistance.

He had already formulated the doctrine which so greatly influenced the religious thought of his time and left its mark on the spiritual life of France for long after his death. His teaching was revolutionary. Where before him teachers of the spiritual life had begun with the training of the self, Bérulle laid all the emphasis on God. Adoration and adherence were his watchwords. 'God is the centre,' he said, 'towards which every religious life must continuously tend.' The gaze must be fixed on God, not on self. Nothing must ever be regarded in the distorted light of self, but always in the pure light of God. Adoration is what is primarily asked of man as a spiritual being; recognizing the infinite perfection of God, man must, by absolute adherence to Him, so fill himself with God that there is no longer any room for self. 'Empty me of self!' S. Jean Eudes exclaimed, 'to fill me with Thee!' The more self is driven out the more room there will be for God. Man can only attain to the measure of love and sanctity required of him by an equal measure of self-loss.

Bérulle, who taught this doctrine, was the chief human influence in Mme Acarie's life. After her husband came back from exile and she returned to her own home, Bérulle visited her almost daily to discuss the many projects in which they were both interested and chiefly the founding of the Carmelite Order in France. He was by that time probably her director, a relationship which would make on her side for reverence and awe, and we have in them an instance of a deep spiritual friendship into which no inordinate affection was allowed to creep. Both were so intent on serving God that they forgot themselves.

Mme Acarie now began to attempt the reform of the convents in and around Paris, many of which had grown slack and lukewarm. Duval wisely remarks that ' though religious seldom defer willingly to those who are married, at least in so far as concerns the interior life, God had given her such a particular grace in these matters and she behaved with such humility and dexterity that they did not hesitate to tell her everything.' [1] She was able to infuse them again with the fervour from which all institutions inevitably lapse. Apart from regular religious houses, there had sprung up in that religious renaissance many little companies of women living in community and devoting themselves to the training of girls for the religious life. Such a community at Pontoise was dragging along so languidly that many feared it was ' going up in smoke.' Mme Acarie went there, and not having much time to spare, she spent a whole night in interviewing every member of the house individually, one after the other. And she so inspired them that that community ultimately gave birth to both an Ursuline and a Carmelite convent.

She was convinced of the importance of small beginnings. In many Parisian houses at that time two or three girls banded themselves together, attempting a dedicated life, Mme Acarie making herself responsible for their spiritual training.[2] Brémond uses the word *fermentation* to describe the ardent religious life of Paris at this time, and he thinks it impossible to exaggerate either the activity or the influence of Mme Acarie. Other women were of course working with her, but she was the life and soul of the whole movement.

When she went back to her own vast mansion, she took several girls to live with her who wished

[1] Duval, op. cit., p. 102. [2] ibid., p. 107.

to enter the Carmelite Order. So that while negotiations for the bringing of that Order to France were being carried through in Spain and in Rome, Mme Acarie was already training the first French novices in Paris. This she did with the consent and approval of Bérulle and Duval, who, 'realizing her genius in the conduct of souls, left it to her to determine the presence of vocation in those she received. . . .' [1]

Here we have an extraordinary situation, surely without parallel in the history of religion! A woman living in the world in her husband's house, bringing up her children and managing a vast establishment, having no authority under the Church—and yet training novices who afterwards became founders of religious houses all over France. It was through the broad-minded and noble wisdom of Henri de Gondi, Bishop of Paris and Cardinal de Retz, that she was allowed to do everything she wished in the service of the Church.

She had, in what Duval calls a 'sublime degree,' the gift of discernment of spirits. At this time of religious fermentation, real or pretended mystics seemed to spring forth on every side; the priests were not quite ready for them, not knowing how to move gently between credulity and scepticism. Humble and retiring as Mme Acarie was, she became almost at once a recognized authority on these delicate matters. She received many learned priests in her *salon*. They went to her to enlist her sympathy in some religious or charitable object, and while with her consulted her about those of their flock whose apparent vocation to the contemplative life was troubling them, often handing over such cases to her care. Recognizing her wisdom and what seemed to them her supernatural

[1] Brémond, op. cit., ii. 252.

insight, many of them were led to ask her advice on their own lives.

She was very particular as to the novices she received, not even bowing before the wishes of Bérulle or any other ecclesiastic when they proposed some rich lady whose dowry might have been useful to a new community.

'I am not anxious,' said Mme Acarie, 'about the money we require for the material building. I am only anxious about the living stones necessary to build up the spiritual edifice. If I knew a soul fitted for such a building, I would give all the gold in the world to procure it. And to exclude one which was not suitable, I would willingly pay as much. . . . One must search right down into the depths of the soul to see if God is there, or at least if He will come there after religion has cultivated that soul.' [1]

But now, into the midst of this forcing-house of religion, a totally incongruous and almost comic element is suddenly introduced. Pierre Acarie returns from exile to find his house transformed into a convent, his wife regarded with reverence by the religious world of Paris, his door besieged by people of every rank and station begging for interviews with her, her correspondence swollen to vast dimensions.

No one could help being sorry for this poor husband with all his little failings; and they were after all *little* failings, those of a very ordinary man who had somehow happened to marry a saint. He seems to have borne the situation fairly well, and we can sympathize with his occasional orders that no one asking to see his wife, should be admitted. 'It is most inconvenient,' he would say pathetically, 'to have such a wise and virtuous wife!'

Having now nothing to do and living as it were at the head-quarters of a spiritual army, he became

[1] ibid., op. cit., ii. 255.

curious about this ' interior life ' ; he wished to be present at his wife's interviews with those who came to ask her advice on spiritual matters and he wished to read her letters ; seeing that they were as secret as the confessional she had of course to conceal them from him.

The postulants living in the house seem to have entered into this Gilbertian situation. They took it in turns to amuse him, to take him out or get him into some quiet corner and there allow him to expatiate on his exploits in connection with the Holy League. A particularly charming Marquise de Bréauté, who came daily to see Mme Acarie, was gifted with the convenient power of twisting him round her little finger. When he was being very difficult she would ask him, smilingly, to go for a drive with her, and she made herself so pleasant to him that he said to his wife, ' You are surely never going to make a Carmelite of that charming Marquise ! ' A hope which, needless to say, was soon shattered.

It was possibly on M. Acarie's account that the postulants were presently moved into another house in the Place Ste Geneviève which gave the little congregation its name. By 1607 all its members had been absorbed into the Carmelite or Ursuline Orders and after that all postulants went direct to their Orders. Mme Acarie thought no novice or postulant could be too thoroughly tested, and considered that one of the greatest faults and dangers of religious houses lay in their receiving aspirants too easily. She supplied the Carmelites with many well-trained postulants but she also returned to the world many whose vocation lay there.

Though Bérulle and Mme Acarie had long dreamt of bringing the Carmelite Order to France,

others had had the same desire. Juan de Quintanaduenas, a rich and generous layman of Seville, had long cherished such a dream, but even he was not the first. In the beginning of her *Way of Perfection*, S. Teresa had written of the miseries of France and the havoc the heretics made there. 'It troubled me exceedingly,' she says, 'and as though I could have done or been something, I cried out to our Lord and besought Him to remedy so great an evil.'

Quintanaduenas had pled before the Carmelite Fathers—S. John of the Cross being among them—that Carmelite nuns might be sent to France, but his efforts had no result. Then hearing that Anne of Jesus was rescuing the works of S. Teresa, which had been left in the hands of the Inquisition, he sent her a sum of money to cover the cost of the publication of the first edition which appeared in 1588. He then, with the help of Père du Chévre, translated the *Life* into French and had a copper-plate engraving of S. Teresa reproduced which, along with the *Life*, soon spread over France—

> By which means all sorts of people . . . were attracted to the interior life and many maidens of the chief towns of the kingdom conceived a desire to enter this Order.[1]

Teresa's works soon being on sale in Paris, Mme Acarie's friends read them eagerly and spoke of them constantly, and she asked that they might be read to her, seeing that owing to her peculiar psychic make-up she could not read them to herself. Perhaps for that reason, perhaps because she had herself experienced many of the states Teresa wrote of, and was in many ways very like her, she was not at first greatly struck by Teresa's

[1] *Mémoire sur la fondation, etc., des carmélites déchaussées*, i. 528 ; see also Brémond, op. cit., ii. 281.

works. But presently while in prayer, a vision of the saint appeared to her telling her it was the will of God she should found houses of the Reformed Carmelite Order in France. She called a meeting of her 'Staff' (1601) at which Bérulle, Duval, and Quintanaduenas were present, as well as her confessor Père Beaucousin and two learned priests, M. Gallemant and M. de Brétigny. But the difficulties seemed insurmountable and so the project was dropped.

A few months later Mme Acarie had another vision of S. Teresa, who then commanded her vehemently to go forward with this affair which would assuredly succeed. Another meeting was arranged at which S. François de Sales, then preaching in Paris with growing reputation, was present. It was decided to go on, to have the first house in Paris, to send one deputation to Spain to bring back the Spanish Carmelites and another to Rome to get powers from the Pope for the foundation of a house of the Reformed Carmelite Order in France.

Owing to Mme Acarie's influence with King and Parliament, an old Benedictine Priory was secured, standing in its own grounds, in which a convent on the lines laid down by S. Teresa could be built. The site was said to be that on which S. Denis, the Apostle of France, had lived.

Though Mme Acarie had as yet neither the promise of Spanish Carmelites nor the permission of the Pope for the new foundation, she prosecuted the training of the French novices with renewed vigour. She also superintended the renovation of the old Priory and the erection of the necessary new buildings, in all of this being greatly helped by De Marillac, Chancellor of France. He had been stung to activity by reading the works of

S. Teresa, and he now put himself eagerly at the disposal of Mme Acarie in the interests of the proposed Carmelite convent. 'Princes of the blood, Doctors of the Sorbonne, Magistrates, heroic women of every class—all France combined in the foundation of the French Carmel.' [1]

On March 29, 1603, the foundation stones were laid, Marie de Medicis laying the first stone of the cloisters by proxy of the Duchess of Nemours, amid a great and brilliant assemblage of the secular and ecclesiastical aristocracy. A few days later Mme Acarie went down with Bérulle and de Marillac into the trench dug for the foundations of the choir. 'You will be the foundation of this edifice on the spiritual side,' she said to Bérulle, 'and you,' turning to de Marillac, 'on the temporal.' And till his death Bérulle was in fact the spiritual director of the convent, while de Marillac not only gave it large sums of money but himself looked after its business affairs.

Six months later Pope Clement VIII granted the Bull of the Institution, putting the Carmelites of France under the authority of Bérulle, Gallemant, and Duval, 'to maintain on French soil with the utmost exactitude the pure spirit of S. Teresa.'

But the coming of the Carmelites was long delayed. The General of the Order opposed the whole affair. In November, 1603, Quintanaduenas and some of the French novices trained by Mme Acarie set sail for Spain to study the life of the Order at its source and to escort the Spanish Sisters back to France. After a stormy voyage they landed at Laredo on the Bay of Biscay, riding thence on mules through Burgos to Valladolid. They must have been in good spirits, for when riding through a mountain gorge along the top of

[1] Brémond, op. cit., ii. 285.

a sheer precipice, Mme Jourdain, the leading spirit of the party, called out, 'After all, I can only fall into the arms of God!' At Valladolid they were received with every honour; they went every day to the Carmelite convent to be initiated into the Rule and drink of the well-spring of S. Teresa.

The Mother-Superior was impressed by their spirituality and their power of prayer; Mme Acarie had trained them well. The court also received and enjoyed them. But the Carmelite Fathers were unbending and would not hear of any of the Carmelite Sisters going to France. Then Bérulle himself set out for Spain. He won the day, for he took with him a papal *bref de jussion*, which ordered the Carmelite General on pain of major excommunication and deposition from office, to obey the Pope's commands and allow any six Carmelites chosen by Bérulle to return with him to France. 'Bérulle made good,' says Brémond, 'with a saintly but gently persistent severity which deeply impressed the Spaniards.' And he was not modest! He demanded the flower of the flock, among them Anne of St. Bartholomew, for many years the travelling companion, nurse, and secretary of S. Teresa, who died in her arms. And as Superior he asked for S. Teresa's trusted and beloved friend, Anne of Jesus. She also was impressed by Bérulle's firmness. 'This little Don Pedro has more force and vigour than all the rest of you put together!' she exclaimed. 'Our blessed Mother would have liked him well!'

Bérulle himself was well pleased with the result of his mission. 'If S. Teresa still lived,' he wrote to Mme Acarie, 'she could not have given better Carmelites to France, unless she had come herself!'

The Venerable Anne of Jesus had been born a deaf-mute but had been miraculously cured. When

The Ven. ANNE of JESUS and Mme. ACARIE

she entered the Convent of San José, S. Teresa took her into her own cell and entrusted her with all the most important duties. 'Anne does all the work,' Teresa said, 'while I get the credit!' And S. John of the Cross who wrote his *Spiritual Canticle* for her, called her a Seraphim! Small wonder that the Carmelites were loath to part with her. Born in 1545 and professed in 1575, she was well past middle life when she came to France, somewhat austere, somewhat prejudiced against France, doubtful of how it would be to work under the authority of priests who were neither Carmelites nor Spaniards—but withal a saint, and a great saint.

The journey back was long and difficult, and it shows us with what misgivings the Spanish Sisters left their own land, that one of them carried a little jug of holy water to exorcize the devils clinging to the carriage wheels. But on October 15, 1604, they arrived in Paris. As they entered the city two carriages drove out to welcome them; in the first were two royal princesses, in the second Mme Acarie and her three daughters. Bérulle rode alongside looking, with his magnificent saddle-cloth, 'like a really great prelate.'

The Spanish Carmelites were amazed and enchanted by the beauty of their convent church. France was not so bad after all! The King asked for their prayers, the whole country was delighted at their coming, while they themselves were struck by the devotion they saw on every side. 'The frequentation of the Holy Sacrament,' said Anne of Jesus, 'resembles that of the early Church.' Before the end of the year the first French Carmelites had taken the habit, and it was said of them that the Spanish Sisters in their own country had never met with greater sanctity nor with more

of those human qualities S. Teresa herself prized so highly—'common sense, spirit, and grace.'[1]

In 1605 another Carmelite house was founded at Pontoise; then Anne of Jesus felt impelled to establish a convent at Dijon (famous for its connection with Mme de Chantal); others followed quickly, and when the last of the original Spanish Sisters died in 1644 there were already fifty-five houses of the Order in France.

Thus was the bracing Teresian conception of the spiritual life brought into France by nuns trained under S. Teresa herself. The difficulties overcome in order to carry out this project were such as would have aroused even Teresa's fighting spirit; the results would have satisfied even her high ideals. The coming of the Carmelites to France at that time brought the vigour and new life the French Church lacked, and of all the French Carmelites none were moulded more truly in the spirit of S. Teresa than Mme Acarie's three daughters.

After her husband's death in 1613, Mme Acarie was able to fulfil a desire she had cherished since her girlhood. She was now forty-seven; she felt she had done what was required of her in the world; her daughters had all joined the Carmelite Order, her sons were all away from home; there was nothing now to prevent her from withdrawing from the world. She naturally sought refuge as a lay-sister in the Carmelite Order, being known in religion as Marie de l'Incarnation. She was received at Amiens, where the ceremony was fixed for an early hour that the natives might not be distressed by the sight of her ecstasy, which was evidently regarded as an inevitable weakness, not to be exposed.

In these last four years of her life the relation-

[1] Brémond, op. cit., ii. 308.

ship between herself and her daughters was reversed. She was now a humble lay-sister; her eldest daughter was Sub-Prioress at Amiens, and with all the rest of the community, her mother submitted to her rule—'an end witnessing more surely to her greatness of soul than the ecstasies and activities for which she is generally known.' [1]

Marguerite, the second daughter, was very unlike the conventional idea of a mother-superior but she was one after the very heart of S. Teresa. Hating anything forced or unnatural, demanding of her flock a simple, open, joyful spirituality, she was not outwardly impressive. But Brémond, while he describes her as a lively Parisian, impulsive, brusque, always making straight for the point, regards her as representing, among all the great French daughters of S. Teresa, the Carmelite ideal. Few suspected what she herself did her best to conceal, a spiritual life even more remarkable than that of her mother. Such a life consists, according to her, 'in few words but in a very great tendency to God.' When living at Pontoise under her rule, Mme Acarie, the new lay-sister, asked Marguerite one day what she should do for her spiritual advancement. Marguerite replied: 'You should mortify yourself, for seeing that you have so long instructed others and acted according to your own inclinations, even although these are absolutely good, there is nevertheless much of your own will in your conduct. You should try to mortify that!'

Mme Acarie is said to have been 'a little surprised though edified'; but one of the other sisters took Marguerite to task. 'How *could* you speak to your mother like that!' she exclaimed. 'Why did she ask me then,' Marguerite replied. 'She

[1] Evelyn Underhill, *Mystics of the Church*, p. 194.

knows quite well I am only a stupid, blundering creature! I did not know what to say! I only said what I thought!'

The truth was what mattered, nothing personal came into the problem.

We have followed the chief external incidents of Mme Acarie's life. It was characteristic of her that she never spoke of her spiritual experiences even to her nearest friends. But those who had the privilege of meeting her, felt in her presence that peculiar awe and reverence of which we are so keenly aware in holy places or in the presence of a saint. She herself, like many saints, preferred to be thought scatter-brained and frivolous; she could not bear to be reverenced. Of her inner circle of friends none liked to inquire into what she so plainly wished to conceal. A priest did say something to her one day about the 'sublimity of her life of prayer.'

'Father!' she replied quickly, 'I should be well content if I could live in the fear of God, keeping His commandments, and saying my rosary (which was often impossible to her because of her ecstasies). What can a married woman like me expect to do, with a house and children to look after?'

S. François de Sales, who was for a time her confessor, believed she would willingly have told him about her inner life had he asked her—'but the infinite respect I had for her prevented me from asking.' He too felt over-awed in her presence. It was from her he learnt much that he afterwards wrote down in his *Treatise of the Love of God*. In it he formulates, with the authority of a theologian, a way of life which was lived long before his book appeared, by Mme Acarie. Perfection, for her too, depended on self, not on circumstance; it was a question both of divine grace and human

effort; saintliness was dependent on the faithful performance of the humble duties of everyday life. She did not think every one capable of living the interior life, but she knew that many timid and scrupulous souls were either unaware of their talent or had wrapped it in a napkin and were afraid to give themselves up to it. She thought no one could be a good Christian who was not laborious in the duties of his calling. Religion was thus a life rather than a system; it was to *be*, rather than to *do*; it was a tendency to reproduce in man something of the perfection of God. It was probably from Mme Acarie too that François de Sales learnt much of what he afterwards taught as to interior prayer.

'Breathe in God by the heart,' he said. 'Stay quietly with Him. Leave yourself in His hands. If you want to work well, you must pray, for it is in prayer that you learn to work well. . . . The object of prayer is union with God. For after all God has no need of our prayers!'

His teaching on the infectious radiance of souls may well have been prompted by what he saw of it in Mme Acarie. For though she wrote nothing and said little, her influence was felt through all that spiritual efflorescence as a radiance and contagion. As S. Augustine said, *One loving spirit sets another on fire*. And even although that spirit may try to appear ordinary and even frivolous, the radiance shines through. Mme Acarie's very humility had something otherworldly about it: 'Her profound and solid humility was the veil which covered the *sancta sanctorum* of her soul.' The effect of her contagion on others was to imbue them with a deep seriousness, a very different thing from gloom or heaviness; a seriousness which revealed to them the divine spark within themselves and called them to tend it and let the winds

of heaven blow upon it and fan it to such a radiance that it in its turn should gleam out on others and set them on fire too. Such an influence can never come to an end, though, as in the case of Mme Acarie, the central figure may be forgotten; the influence, once started on its way, radiates out to eternity.

She was only fifty-two when she died. When we think of her always indifferent health, and how she was handicapped by the strange nervous temperament which so often accompanies genius, her achievements are surprising. The introduction of the Carmel of S. Teresa to France was outwardly her greatest work, though she also, with Mme Sainte-Beuve, reorganized the Ursulines and roused fresh ardour wherever she went. But more than all that, 'she knew and by her attraction formed into a group, stimulated, and even directed, nearly all the great spiritual geniuses of her time. One may frankly say that of all the beacons of religion lit during the reign of Henri IV, none equalled in brilliance, intensity, or radiance that of Mme Acarie.'[1] In 1791 she was beatified as the Blessed Marie de l'Incarnation.

When the new edition of the *Life* of S. Catharine of Genoa was published in Paris, Benedict Canfield and his friends began to talk of it one night; he told them it was his conviction that the spiritual life of Mme Acarie was grander, more intellectual, and more to be admired, and that one day this would be recognized. This has not proved to be the case. We do not really know enough about Mme Acarie to make such a comparison, and she left no writings. The story is only quoted to show on what level her contemporaries put her. They saw in her an example of that sublime life towards

[1] Brémond, op. cit., ii. 194.

which, at that period, innumerable souls were striving. Her ecstasies were to them nothing but the outward signs of inner light. They were the accidents; the solid truths they learned from her were of a very different nature. She was very simple, with a simplicity characteristic of a movement whose whole teaching was embraced in the words of the Gospel, *The kingdom of heaven is within you.*

While it was Bérulle who formulated the doctrine of this spiritual renaissance and while S. François de Sales was its best-known exponent, Mme Acarie was its inspiration and she lived its life. For thirty years she never knew what it was to be without pain, but the more she suffered, the more she wished to suffer. 'This desire of suffering will kill me!' she exclaimed, the desire of suffering as Christ did on the Cross. But her face remained smiling and tranquil; the greater her pain, the greater her peace seemed to be. Suffering had taught her, she said, how she of herself was nothing, merely a tiny channel whose waters flowed from the Infinite Ocean of the goodness of God.

Once when she was very ill and suffering, her attendants, not knowing what to do to relieve her, wrapped her in a cloak which had been worn by S. Teresa. The thought of it filled her with joy and for a quarter of an hour she slept peacefully. But she refused to accept that remedy again; she wanted no anodyne, she wanted, like S. Teresa herself, to accept the full rigour of life, and to accept it joyfully.

The story inevitably suggests the thought that the mantle of S. Teresa had fallen on her. They had much in common. But while we know a great deal about S. Teresa, we know very little about Mme Acarie. Yet she too was a heroic woman

who lived constantly and consciously in the presence of God. As we think of her, a fragile but valiant figure, going through life on crutches but moving her mountains none the less, we are reminded of S. Teresa's chivalrous words :

His Majesty exceedingly loveth the courageous soul.

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VEN. MARIE DE L'INCARNATION, 1599–1672

THOUGH it was Mme Acarie who brought S. Teresa's virile conception of the spiritual life to France, the title of the 'French Teresa' was not bestowed on her, but on Marie Guyard who carried that bracing conception across the Atlantic. She was born when Mme Acarie was thirty-three, in the year in which Bérulle was ordained—an interesting coincidence seeing that she lived that twofold life of adoration and adherence in which Bérulle declared the whole duty and joy of a spiritual man to consist.

Marie Guyard was not only a great contemplative saint, she not only took out and established an Ursuline mission in Quebec and worked for over thirty years among the Huron Indians and Iroquois, but she had a genius for describing the experiences of her inner life. And she had a constant incentive to do so, for her only child was left behind in France. He too was a contemplative for whose spiritual development she felt the more responsible that she had allowed herself to be separated from him. And so she wrote him long, careful letters, that her experiences might be a guide to his.

He became a member of the erudite Congregation of the Benedictines of St. Maur (in which he was a contemporary of the great Mabillon) and rose to be one of the spiritual forces of his time. When Prior of the Abbey of Marmoutier, he wrote the

Life of his mother in a huge volume of over seven hundred pages; he also published her *Letters* in two large volumes and her *Meditations* in one small one, a book which is, according to the Abbé Brémond, 'more useful than twenty treatises on Mysticism.' So that we are in the happy position of being able to study her life from a rich plenty of authentic material, to draw our knowledge fresh from the spring. And Brémond himself devotes half a volume of his monumental *Histoire Littéraire du Sentiment Religieux en France* to the study of this mother and son.

Marie Guyard was born in Tours on October 28, 1599. Her father was a silk-merchant; her mother belonged to the old aristocracy of France, but owing to the declining fortunes of her family was allowed to marry into the bourgeoisie. She had several children but Marie is the only one we know anything about.

As a little child the first grace she received was, she tells us, a lively faith which implanted in her spirit a firm belief in the Divine Mysteries.

> The sound education my parents gave me laid a good foundation in my soul for all the benefits of Christianity and for good habits; and when I was able to reflect, I thanked God for the graces He had been pleased to bestow on me . . . as much for being truly disposed to a vocation of real devotion as that He caused me to fall into hands which made these tendencies take a good direction from my earliest years.[1]

She continues, in a picture which lets us see the serious little girl, to tell us how from her childhood she had been told that God spoke by the lips of preachers and how she had, therefore, a great desire to go and hear them even while still so

[1] *La Vie de la Vénérable Mère Marie de l'Incarnation . . . tirée de ses lettres et de ses écrits*, pp. 12, 13. Paris, Pierre de Bats, 1684.

young that she could understand little of what they said.

I had such veneration for preachers that when I saw one in the street I felt inclined to run after him and kiss his footsteps. Shyness held me back, but I used to gaze after them till they were lost to sight. I found nothing greater than the Word of God. When I heard it, it seemed to me my heart was like a vessel into which the Divine Word flowed like a liquid. . . . My soul . . . having received this rich plenty could only contain itself by allowing it to evaporate in prayer and converse with God. I was even obliged to speak out loud because my spirit could not contain this abundance.[1]

She was at this time about six years old, becoming intensely interested in real things. She dreamt of Christ, and how He said to her, 'Dost thou wish to belong to Me?' and these words remained with her, thrilling her through and through.

I began to treat of my little needs with our Lord, which I did with great simplicity, not thinking it possible He could refuse anything we asked Him humbly. That was why in church I observed the postures of those who prayed and . . . said to myself, 'God will surely help *that* person because she prays with humility.'[2]

She used to watch her mother too, who, when alone in the shop, waiting for customers, would make eager, loving aspirations.

I heard her talking to our Lord about her children and all her little necessities. You can have no idea what an impression it made on my spirit.[3]

It does not appear that any one taught the little girl about the life of prayer; it was the natural everyday life of that silk shop, and so she grew up to pray as naturally as she breathed. She was too honest to see sin where there was none. Like Shepherd Easton's daughter, 'she didn-never *do*

[1] *La Vie*, pp. 17, 18. [2] ibid., pp. 2, 3.
[3] *Lettres*, pp. 235, 236.

no sins,' but the 'touches of God' she experienced showed her that nothing was small in His eyes; and so she learned, when about sixteen, that she must deal even with the shadow of an imperfection.

But she hid all this deeper side under so gay and playful an exterior that even her mother did not think her suited to the religious life. She was only eighteen when she was married to Claude Martin, a silk manufacturer, about whom we know nothing except that when he died three years later he left his affairs in much confusion and a little son of not quite a year old for his young widow to bring up.

She had a good head for business, and she set to work to wind up his affairs at the office. But on the way there one morning—

> I was stopped short inwardly and outwardly. By this sudden arrest all thoughts of my own affairs were swept clean from my memory.
>
> Then the eyes of my spirit were opened in a moment and I saw all the faults and imperfections I had committed since I came into the world; they were set before me in detail with a clearness and distinctness beyond words.

She saw herself—as Julian of Norwich and S. Catharine of Genoa had seen themselves—as if bathed in the Blood of Christ; she felt herself responsible, like them, for the shedding of that Blood by the sins so clearly spread before her. The sight of these sins, small as they were, appalled her; she perceived that she personally was culpable and that if she had been the only human being who had thus sinned, the Son of God would still have done for her alone what He had done for all. That thought overwhelmed her.

> My heart was ravished in itself and all changed into love for Him who had shown it this extraordinary mercy; it suffered in its great love such overwhelming regret for having offended that it was impossible to imagine it. This love was so pene-

trating and so inexorable . . . that I could have thrown myself into the flames. What is even more incomprehensible, its very rigour seemed gentle to me.[1]

Coming to herself, she found herself outside a chapel and, still in a state of exaltation, she went in, and without waiting to enter the confessional, poured forth all her sins and imperfections to an astonished priest she found there.

I went home changed into another creature. I saw my ignorance exposed which had led me to think I was fairly perfect and very near to God and I confessed that my virtues were nothing but iniquities.[2]

When at last Madame Martin succeeded in straightening out her husband's business affairs, she ceased to trouble any more about temporal things. The centre of her interest was changed. She was in the world but not of it. Her father and brother-in-law, seeing that she had a natural gift for business, tried to persuade her to accept one of several posts then offered to her. But she was being strongly impelled towards the religious life. She began, as she tells us, 'to wear a ridiculous habit' to show that she no longer cared for the world. She was only twenty-one, her son just over a year old, and she was living in the top flat of her father's house, where solitude was easy to find. There, sitting beside her baby, her hands busy with some peaceful work—for she was an expert needlewoman—her heart spoke continuously with God.

I was astonished by what my heart said in this way without my making it say anything of myself. It seemed to me to be urged by a power above me which moved it continuously and it said what that power made it say. . . . It was all incomprehensible to me.[3]

Towards 1621 she read some books which treated

[1] *La Vie*, p. 29. [2] ibid., pp. 26–28. [3] ibid., p. 31.

of formal prayer—preparation, preludes, points, colloquies, and so on. She tried for a time to practise this formal method, thinking it her duty to persevere. All that resulted was a series of violent headaches. Then she was fortunately led to consult some one wise in such matters, who advised her to give up all attempts at formal meditation and abandon herself utterly to the Spirit of God which had up till then guided her soul.

After living for a year with her father, Mme Martin was called to the help of her sister and brother-in-law. This man, whom Brémond describes as a ' travelling nabob,' was an agent for the transport of merchandise and goods all over France. He was said to keep the largest establishment in the whole province—men, horses, coaches, carriages, the whole equipment of a great livery-stable and clearing-house. Life there was an incessant turmoil, a whirl of arrivals and departures, shouting, cracking of whips, neighing of horses, lumbering of wheels, every one was overworked and overwhelmed.

This was the atmosphere in which little Claude Martin grew up and which his solitude-loving mother had to endure. For some years she helped in the kitchen, then she was promoted to the office :

> I found myself among the noise of merchants and yet my spirit was sunk in the Divine Majesty. I spent whole days in a stable which served as an office ; sometimes it was midnight and I was still at the gate seeing to the loading and unloading of merchandise. My usual companions were ostlers and coachmen and even the fifty or sixty horses for which I was responsible. I had also all the affairs of my brother-in-law and sister on my shoulders when they were in the country as often happened.[1]

[1] ibid., pp. 54, 55.

But even here, in the office or in the stable, among ledgers, coachmen, and horses, 'the life of Mme Martin was one long ecstasy.' She describes her state at this time as one of 'continual tendency to God.'

> I had sometimes an interior sentiment that our Lord was near me, at my side. . . . In this state everything that took place in my soul was more spiritual and abstract than material and sensible. Nevertheless God made the soul understand that He wished to turn it away from every material support, to put it in a state of greater detachment, in a purity as yet unknown. . . . The soul, aware of being called to a more purified state, does not know where it is being led; it is only aware that it is called to things which are sublime but which it does not yet know and cannot conceive. . . . Yet, though my soul knew itself base and vile under so divine a Majesty, its inclination was nevertheless to *possess* that Majesty by a right as yet unknown to it, but of which it had presentiments. It was disclosed to it that it still lacked the necessary dispositions, that it had not yet the graces fitting for so high a possession. That is why it desired to pass through the flames, to arrive where it longed to be.[1]

Like Mme Acarie, though to a lesser extent, Mme Martin found it difficult to practise vocal prayer; her interior occupation at once carried her spirit away, leaving her no time to perform any act, interior or exterior. This she considered a suffering of love which 'must be suffered so long as it pleases Him, the more that it is impossible to withdraw from it.' She too tried to read S. Teresa; she also tried to read S. François de Sales (who had just died); and from her writings and aspirations it seems very likely that she read the life of S. Catharine of Genoa. When she could it comforted her, but often she could read nothing. She was so filled with joy at this time that when walking along she could not help springing into

[1] *La Vie*, pp. 44, 45.

the air, 'so that any who had seen me must have thought me mad.'

'And so in fact I was!' she exclaims. 'I thought of Jesus . . . in His Divinity and when I had sung His praises I took a pen and wrote down my transports of love to cool the fervour of my spirit, for otherwise my nature could not have borne so much.'[1]

And all this did not only happen when she was alone, but wherever she might happen to be, in the street, the stable, the office, in the stir of crowds—'while engaged in the most worldly pursuits her spirit was continuously bound to the Word Incarnate.'

After living in this state of illumination for about eight years, Mme Martin's life took an even more vehement course. One morning when at Mass she looked up at the altar:

And in a moment my eyes were closed and my spirit raised and absorbed in a vision of the most Holy Trinity . . . an impression without form or figure but clearer and more intelligible than all light, making me conscious at once that my soul was *in* the Truth, thus in a single moment making me see the divine intercourse which these three Divine Persons have with each other. . . .[2]

She goes on to try to explain what she had experienced, attempting to put into words what no words can express. Of another experience in which she was made aware of the mystery of the Incarnation, she writes:

It is true that I had read something which bore on it, but whatsoever I might have been able to read, could never even distantly approach the effect which a visit of God brings to and impresses on the soul. . . . The soul found itself *in* the Truth and understood this divine intercourse in a moment. . . . The whole was contemplated and seen by the soul with a fixed and purified regard, freed from all ignorance and in an

[1] ibid., pp. 50, 51. [2] ibid., pp. 77, 79.

ineffable manner. . . . The soul was lost in this great ocean where it saw and heard things which were inexplicable. . . . I was so occupied interiorly with this, that on going to attend to various external things, I could not divert myself from it.[1]

It has however to be remarked, that none of all these experiences led Mme Martin to neglect any of her duties. Finding herself about this time among a noisy crowd in the stable, 'My soul experienced a Paradise in the midst of that inferno,' she says.

Being thus engulfed in the presence of this adorable Majesty, the sacred Person of the Divine Word gave me suddenly to understand that He *was truly* the Bridegroom of the soul which was faithful to Him. I heard this truth with certitude and the knowledge which was thus given to me was as a preparation to me to see it effected in myself. . . . I felt myself filled with a vehement love without being able to make a single interior act to relieve myself, and that lasted two or three days, during which it seemed as if my heart must burst. . . . I felt in my body suffering so great that if it had gone on I must have died.

When this suffering was at last removed from her :

It was as if the blow-hole of a furnace had been opened to give vent to the flames. For my heart . . . leapt up, as by a vengeance of love, towards Him who had made me suffer. Then blind, without reason and in great privation, I said to Him, 'Dost Thou not then wish me to die, O Love? Being so closely united to Thee, dost Thou not know that I cannot live with those who do not love Thee?' . . .

It was impossible for me to moderate this impetuosity. It might well be called a martyrdom but one most sweet. The body suffered grievously because it seemed in the region of my chest, as if an opening would have to be made. . . . If I could have spoken I should have got relief, but all my powers were bound. I was bound on all hands. The soul, in suffering, loved with a fixed love which was infused in it. It saw very well, nevertheless, that it would find its way back through the privation by which it had been ennobled—but the time was not yet.[2]

[1] *La Vie*, pp. 81, 82. [2] ibid., pp. 105, 128.

She used to find relief in writing down the 'transports of love' which shook her. These she afterwards burnt, but her son found a few of them among her papers, abstract but ardent aspirations which remind us inevitably of those of S. Catharine of Genoa.

Ah! Love! what do I want of Thee? Love, nothing but Love!

O mighty Love! Thou art all and I am nothing! Yet it suffices that the All loves the nothing, that the nothing loves the All!

Sometimes her awe and delight were so great that like many another saint she could do nothing but exclaim, *My God! My God!*

It is difficult on reading this to remember that Mme Martin was leading an active life at this time; the surface part of her consciousness was dealing with carriages and horses, merchandise and ledgers, but she could efficiently do all that while within 'her spirit sang its ineffable song.' Very gradually she left all these transports and vehemences behind her and arrived at a calm tranquillity which lasted all her life, at the state S. Catharine of Siena and S. Teresa called the Mystic Marriage; 'in it the soul possesses the Word in its depths and enjoys its continual presence. It has liberty to do every external work God demands of it; whatsoever it does, nothing distracts it.'

Trying herself to explain this, Mme Martin says that her soul gradually became more simplified and made fewer interior or exterior acts which might have aroused feelings. But in the depths such aspirations as 'Ah! my Love! Blessed be Thou!' were continual, or simply 'My God! My God!'

These fundamental words filled me with tender nourishment without any feeling. Our Lord then removed from me those

transports and ravishments, and since that time my soul has remained in its centre which is God and this centre is in itself where it is above all feeling. It is so simple and delicate a thing that the soul cannot express it. . . . One can read, write, work, and do what one likes but all the while this fundamental occupation remains always there ; the soul never ceases to be united to God. Even the very immensities of God do not distract it, but without being disturbed by them, it remains attached to God in its simplicity. Everything takes place in calm detachment from the senses ; such is the felicity of the Blessed. . . .

This manner of being with God is continual with me ; I never leave it if some new light does not lead me away from it for a moment and then, all at once, I find myself back in the same state.[1]

Living in the age of Cardinal de Bérulle, Mme Martin thus lived his doctrine of Adoration and Adherence—God is the centre towards which every religious life must continuously tend. The gaze must be fixed on God and turned resolutely away from self. Man must recognize the perfection of God and so utterly unite himself with God, lose himself in God, fill himself with God, that there is no longer any room for self.

By the end of 1630, when thirty years old, she had attained to the realization of such a life. Her son was now a boy of ten ; she herself was being more and more insistently called to the religious life.

If there was anything in the world which attracted me it was the life of a religious. . . . But I was often afraid that this was a temptation (of spiritual self-seeking), and I lamented it before God, saying, 'Alas ! well-beloved ! take from me, if it please Thee, this desire ! I have a son. I must look after him ! ' But this lamentation was followed by an interior reproach that I lacked confidence, the Divine Goodness being rich enough for both my son and myself.[2]

Eventually, in 1630, she decided to enter the

[1] *La Vie*, pp. 151 sqq. [2] ibid., p. 158

Ursuline [1] convent at Tours, and she quietly made all her preparations. Claude watched them, saying nothing, but being in a state of 'confused misery.' Before passing judgement on her, let us see how he who was most nearly concerned, afterwards regarded his mother's action. At the time he resented it bitterly, but this is what he wrote about it many years later :

> This son was an Isaac, an only son. I do not doubt that so novel an abandonment, so apparently contrary to the laws of nature, would be condemned by those who rule themselves by the laws of reason. But it must be admitted that supernatural insights, when they enlighten the saints . . . make them see these things in quite a different light from that of reason alone. I do not doubt that the light which made Abraham see that he must sacrifice his only son . . . was the same which made this generous soul see that she must abandon hers, after God had many times declared that such was His will. She did not leave him from thoughtlessness, nor from any wish to get rid of him. . . . Moreover, she had a deep affection for him . . . for the force of grace carried her away; whatever love she had for him, she had infinitely more for God who commanded her to leave him. And after all Christ gave the command to leave father, mother, and children ; it follows that one *may* obey this command and that sometimes one *must*.[2]

It was no easy sacrifice for Mme Martin. She had a warm, generous nature, and her affections were strong ; like Mme de Chantal, she had a 'terribly human heart.' It is painful to try to realize the agony it must have been to her to leave him. The reason she did it is one about which we

[1] In the sixteenth century Angela Merici of Brescia gathered together, under the banner of S. Ursula, a number of young women living the religious life and dedicated to educative work among girls. This Order had lately begun to spread in France, Mme Acarie had done much to help it, and Mme Martin had been deeply impressed by what she heard of the fervour and zeal of these teaching Ursulines.

[2] *La Vie*, p. 171.

cannot argue, for it is final. She felt it to be the will of God.

I said to Him, the very night before leaving, that He must not allow me to commit a fault in leaving this child, if He did not wish me to leave it ; but also, that if such was His will, I would surmount all human reasonings for His love. . . . It seemed as if I wished to constrain Him to reply. I said to Him ceaselessly, ' Ah ! dost Thou ask it ? Ah ! my Love, tell me, dost Thou ask it ? ' . . .

My inner peace deepened continuously and urged inwardly to obey with promptness, I saw myself so utterly withdrawn from all creatures that I could no longer attend to anything.[1]

But this Isaac was not so docile as his namesake. He did not allow himself to be sacrificed without a protest. A fortnight before his mother was to enter the convent, he ran away. She thought he had been drowned or stolen ; she sent out search-parties into the country.

' Ah ! God ! ' she writes ; ' I had never dreamt that the *losing* of a child could be so terrible ! I have seen him ill, at the point of death, and I could then have peacefully given him to our Lord, but to lose him is more than I can comprehend ! '

But Claude had only taken refuge with a priest he knew in Paris, driven to escape from the mournful looks everybody cast at him, the whisperings behind his back, the general atmosphere of foreboding, hoping perhaps to delay his mother's departure. Three days later he was sent back.

For some years his mother had feared she might have to leave him and so she had insensibly prepared him for it. She never allowed many outward signs of affection, so that when he should have to do without them all, it might not be too hard for him. It is pathetic and rather beautiful, as Brémond points out, that Claude, writing forty years later, says everything he can to make us admire his

[1] *La Vie*, p. 176.

mother, that no aspersion may be cast on her memory.

It was on January 25, 1631, that she left her home to enter the Ursuline convent, and it was in keeping with her training of him that she took him with her. He walked beside her, accompanied by a few of her friends. He tried to hide his grief but she saw the tears rolling silently down his cheeks.

> It seemed as if my soul were being torn out of my body. But God was dearer to me than all that. . . . Leaving him therefore in His hands, I said good bye to him, smiling.[1]

Because of her devotion to the Word Incarnate, she took the name of Marie de l'Incarnation. The convent had only been one year established in Tours ; the building was not yet finished and while building operations were going on the gates were left open for the workmen. Claude took advantage of this to look for his mother. Sometimes he found her in the garden, sometimes he penetrated right into the house, sometimes he threw his hat and coat down where he knew she must see them.

But she had put her hand to the plough, and for one of her temper there was no turning back. It is easy to see how she suffered. Friends and relatives deluged Claude with sympathy mixed with criticism of his mother ; they assured him he was being neglected, that he was much to be pitied. She tells us about that too :

> Before I entered the convent there was nothing more innocent than my son, but all the things that were said to him changed and embittered him, so that he no longer wished to study or do anything, and it seemed as if he would never come to any good. Temptation attacked me often from that quarter, trying to persuade me that I was the cause of all this and that I must return to the world to put it straight . . .

[1] ibid., pp. 172 sqq.

that it was not the Spirit of God which had led me to leave the world but only self-love . . . and that, finally, my child would be lost. . . . Nevertheless I had no fear except that I might have offended God, and I would a thousand times rather never have become a religious than have displeased Him in the slightest degree.[1]

Such fears and doubts she regarded as a cross to be borne, and while working painfully through her novitiate she was assured that her son would one day be drawn into the service of God. At that her distress was changed into 'solid peace.' Ten years later, in 1641, Claude did in fact become a religious. But even then he did not cease to reproach her and he used the argument about all that he had lost through not having her care as a boy, to persuade her to write down for him an account of her initiation into the mystic life. It is to Claude, therefore, and to his mother's leaving him, that we owe her detailed accounts of her experiences.

During the eight years Marie de l'Incarnation was with the Ursulines at Tours, she and her son, after the first months, seldom saw each other, partly a self-imposed discipline on the part of the mother who tried to school herself to indifference, tried of course vainly. As for Claude, other interests crowded in upon him. He lived with her sister, a small return for all his mother had done for that household. And always behind him is some mysterious 'person of quality'—possibly a relation of his aristocratic grandmother—who looked after him so well that 'no other child in the town was better dressed than he.'

In the beginning of the seventeenth century, France had founded a colony in Canada at the place now known as Quebec, with the object of

[1] *La Vie*, p. 188.

developing the fur trade with France. Under the guidance of Cardinal Richelieu the *Company of New France* was formed, the whole of the St. Lawrence valley then being made over to France on condition that she should send out three hundred settlers every year and provide three priests for each settlement. The glamour of this far country soon attracted the missionary zeal of the French, still inflamed with the ardour of their religious renaissance. Missionary pioneers vied with each other to go out to the savage peoples of the New World; Jesuits, Franciscans, Ursulines, and Sulpicians followed each other in quick succession.

From her childhood Marie de l'Incarnation had thought that imparting news of the love of God to others was the ideal vocation; that was why as a little girl she had such devotion to preachers. Thoughts of this new field with its wide desert lands and its heathen peoples kindled her enthusiasm afresh. She had a vivid dream in which she saw a far country of which the gates were opened to her by the Virgin Mary accompanied by her Son. He said to her, 'My daughter, it is Canada I have shown you: you must go there and establish a house to the glory of Jesus and Mary.'

> After that I saw no country for me but Canada. My walks were taken in the land of the Hurons. I asked the Eternal Father to enable me to fulfil His commands to establish a house in Canada in which He would be worshipped with Jesus and Mary.[1]

She confided her hopes to her director, a certain Dom Raymond, who though he had the greatest reverence for her spiritual gifts, thought it good to treat her as if she were of no account. He too had hopes of going to Canada, and he mortified her

[1] *La Vénérable Marie de l'Incarnation*, by an Ursuline, pp. 126, 128. Introduction by Mgr Baunard. Paris, 1910.

by telling her she was of so little use that he would have to leave her behind. With all her humility Marie had too quick an intelligence to be taken in by this feigned displeasure and she writes him this characteristic letter; urging him to let her and her friends go out with him.

> Not that we dare to hope we might give you any support in your work but that our courage might be inflamed to imitate you. . . . We see ourselves as tiny midges, but we feel ourselves courageous enough to soar with the eagles of the King of Saints. If we cannot follow them, they will bear us on their wings as, in nature, the eagles carry the little birds.[1]

About this same time a young widow of Alençon, Mme de Peltrie, determined, as a thank-offering on recovering from a serious illness, to devote her whole fortune to endowing a mission in Canada and building a church there in honour of S. Joseph. She and her friend Jean de Bernières, a famous Norman contemplative, began together to draw out a plan for taking a band of French Sisters to work among the savage tribes of Canada. They began to look for three teaching Sisters to teach and evangelize, and three nursing Sisters to staff a little hospital. It was not long before their inquiries led them to hear of Marie de l'Incarnation, who was chosen to lead the mission. Charles de Condren, the great disciple of Cardinal de Bérulle, and Monsieur Vincent, afterwards known as S. Vincent de Paul, approved and blessed the enterprise.

After innumerable delays and difficulties, two other Ursuline nuns and three nursing sisters were chosen. Mme de Peltrie accompanied them and Jean de Bernières not only made all the arrangements for their journey but afterwards kept in touch with them and sent them out regular consignments of supplies. Mme de Peltrie chartered

[1] *La Vénérable Marie de l'Incarnation*, p. 133.

a sloop at her own expense as well as a smaller vessel to carry the stores, and soon the first French women missionaries were ready to embark. The novelty of the enterprise was such that all Paris was stirred when it heard of these heroic women setting sail from Dieppe on what could not but be a long and hazardous voyage.

Dom Raymond had not been able to obtain permission to go to Canada. But he did not hand over his pupil to the Jesuit Fathers there till he was assured she would find among them a director as strict as himself. Writing to tell him she had received another letter 'as humiliating as the first' from the Jesuit priest at Lake Huron, Marie goes on gaily:

> Is not that a good father? Another *you* as far as I can see! I am grateful to him, for I see by this that he cares for my welfare and that if I were near him he would treat me as you would wish![1]

But her leaving France for Canada meant a fresh sacrifice for mother and son, for while she was in France they did occasionally meet. As she passed through Orleans where Claude was studying, he met her and urged many objections, with which his relations had primed him, against her going abroad. She met them firmly:

> 'It is now eight years since I left you,' she said. 'What have you lacked in that time? God has been your father beyond all our hopes . . . not only providing you with necessities, but you have been brought up in a way beyond your station. I am going to Canada it is true, and again it is by the command of God that I leave you. . . . No greater honour could have been shown me; if you love me, you will rejoice too.'[2]

And so he did. He was completely won over, and went away resolved to make his own way in

[1] ibid., p. 140.
[2] Chapot, *Histoire de la V. M. de l'Incarnation*, i. 347.

the world, not to cost the relations who criticized his mother another penny. Two years later he was received into the Congregation of St. Maur. On the very day he heard he was to proceed to Vendôme for his novitiate, and was on his way to hire a horse to carry him there, he met some one coming to tell him that a post had been found for him in Paris, that of Secretary to Cardinal Richelieu. But 'grace,' as he said, 'had struck him . . . and had taken from him all desire for worldly advancement.' And so he rode away to Vendôme and his new life.

Marie de l'Incarnation, Mme de Peltrie, and their companions set sail from Dieppe on May 4, 1639.

'When I stepped into the little boat which was to take us out to the roadstead,' she writes, 'it was like stepping into Paradise, seeing that I thus took the first step towards risking my life for love of Him who gave it to me. I sang in my heart of the mercies of God who had led me with so much love to the point I had so long desired.'[1]

After M. de Bernières had bidden them farewell and stepped over the side into the shore boat, the sails were shaken out, a light breeze filled them and bore the ship gently away, seeming to promise a happy voyage.

The captain put his own cabin at the disposal of the passengers; there the little company sat and had their meals, transforming it into a chapel for saying their offices, the Ursulines and the nursing Sisters reciting the Psalms in alternate verses. There was also on board a Jesuit priest, P. Vimont, who had just been made Superior-General of all the missions in Canada and who acted as chaplain, saying Mass every day when weather permitted. The voyage lasted for nearly four months, during which pirate ships and storms were encountered.

[1] Baunard, op. cit., p. 173.

And once when a towering iceberg bore down on them, all on board gave themselves up for lost. Yet Marie writes :

> During all this commotion my heart and spirit were in absolute peace and tranquillity. I never felt a single tremor of fear but found myself ready to offer myself a living sacrifice in asking God to accept the further sacrifice that I should be deprived of ever seeing my dear savages. . . . Mme de Peltrie clung as if glued to me in order that we might die together.[1]

They were royally received in Quebec on August 1, 1639. After taking part in a service of thanksgiving and receiving Holy Communion the Ursulines were escorted to a poor little house on the banks of the river, not, we are told, unlike the stable of Bethlehem.

It was about a hundred years since Jacques Cartier had discovered Canada (1535). The French colony now numbered about two hundred souls. They were surrounded by savages—the Algonquins, whose language was the key to all the other native dialects, the Hurons, and the Iroquois, a fierce and superstitious people who several times nearly wiped out the French colony, torturing and killing priests and missionaries and keeping the whole country in constant fear of attack.

We cannot here follow the success of the mission. From the very beginning Marie took the savage women and children to her heart. She at once took six little heathen girls to live in her own hut ; they were taught cleanly ways, but we glean some idea of how necessary this was from a stray remark in one of Marie's letters :

> We daily find hairs, bits of coal, and other rubbish in our soup, and sometimes we even discover an old shoe in the soup-pot. But we do not make too much of that.[2]

[1] Chapot, op. cit., i. 376. [2] ibid., i. 392.

A priest who had been there some time came daily to teach the Ursulines the native tongues. Marie herself took up Algonquin, the other two the language of the Hurons.

I can assure you there are plenty of difficulties in learning a language so different from ours, and yet they laugh at me when I say how difficult it is, for they say if the difficulty were really so great, I would not have so much facility. But believe me, the *desire* to speak is a great help! I want my heart to go out by my tongue, to tell my dear neophytes something they can understand about the love of God. . . . I sometimes make colloquies aloud in their presence and they do the same. If only simplicity reigned in all hearts as it reigns in those of our new Christians nothing in the world could be more ravishing. They confess their sins aloud with a candour of which I have never seen the like.[1]

Before long a large and flourishing school had grown up around them, as befitted those living under the banner of S. Ursula; both men and women came to it, and as well as giving them instruction and teaching them how to pray, the Ursulines clothed and fed them, otherwise many of them would have died in the winter. This they were able to do through the help sent out to them from many kind friends in France—material to clothe their scholars and food to feed them; the natives themselves supplying them with vegetables. Though they were crowded into tiny hovels they had no illness in their first year, and Marie wrote that she had never felt so well.

The air is excellent. This is an earthly Paradise where the thorns and crosses grow so lovingly that the more one is pricked by them the more one's heart is filled with peace.[2]

In the spring of 1641, Mme de Peltrie laid the foundation stone of a new monastery. Nine years later it was burnt down; it was rebuilt with the

[1] *Lettres*, i. 105. [2] Chapot, op. cit., i. 398.

help of gifts from France and from the Huron Indians. Later on it was besieged by the Iroquois, when the Sisters had to fly for their lives. That was a time of terrible happenings, intensified by the additional horrors of earthquake. Through it all Marie de l'Incarnation preserved her calm trust in God; she was all things to all men, comforting the natives who had lost everything, supporting her own little growing community, her own scholars.

She had begun by learning Algonquin; before long she had also learned the Huron and Iroquois dialects. By 1688 she was able to write a simple book of Christian belief in Algonquin with a catechism and vocabulary, and finally she compiled a large French and Algonquin dictionary.

When, in September, 1641, Claude took the habit as a Benedictine, one of his mother's prayers was answered. She had by that time been two years in Canada and she wrote to him:

> I have longed for this grace for you, but seeing that vocations come from God I said nothing about it, not wishing to put anything of mine into what belongs to God only. . . . In leaving you it seemed to me that my soul had been separated from my body with extreme suffering. . . . It was necessary to give way to the force of Divine Love, but that has not prevented me from thinking myself, an infinity of times, the most cruel of mothers. I ask your forgiveness, my very dear son, for I am the cause of many of your sufferings.[1]

Claude had a difficult nature and, as she knew, much to overcome in himself. In her attempts to help him she hid nothing from him of her own spiritual growth. She thought she owed him that. For all her brave words, the fact of having left her son haunted her all her life. When over

[1] *Lettres*, i. 326 sqq.

seventy and a French ship brought her a letter from him, she wrote :

> It gave me cause to praise God for all His goodness to you and me. Are you not well pleased, my very dear son, that I abandoned you to His holy leading in leaving you for His love? Have you not found a Good which cannot be estimated? [1]

We have perhaps dwelt too much on this episode which has been much discussed by psychologists. But that which cut right down to the very marrow of Mme Martin's nature could hardly be dismissed as an episode. It was a profound cleavage in her life. It may even be argued that, but for this constant sorrow in her soul, Marie de l'Incarnation could not have risen to the heights of detachment and selflessness she did indeed attain.

It was of course after she went to Canada that her letters to Claude really began. He was then journeying along the same path, though far behind her and greatly needing her guidance. And in spite of being the founder of a new community in a savage country, taken up with all the organization that implied, she never neglected her letters to her son, she never ceased to be a mother.

> 'I have a few moments left,' she writes, 'and I am going to give them to you by the hand of a kind young man who is going to France. . . .
>
> 'You tell me you have not seen any one who has spoken to me since I came to this country ; I asked him to come and see me and I raised my veil that he might be able to tell you he has both seen and spoken to me.' [2]

There is, as the Abbé Brémond says, ' a vivacity, an abandon, a liberty, in her letters which are of

[1] *Lettres*, ii. 407 sqq. It may help to fix Dom Claude Martin in his cultural background to remember that while Prior of the Abbey of St. Denis (1675) he conducted the obsequies of Maréchal Turenne and the famous Cardinal de Retz.

[2] *Lettres*, i. 411.

the world rather than of the convent. Save for certain inevitable changes Marie de l'Incarnation has remained what she was as Mme Martin. She has not tried to stifle her originality, to assume the tone, the preconceived notions, the somewhat faded unction, of a certain type of devotional literature. Her style has not taken the veil.' [1]

When we try to picture to ourselves what she was like outwardly, we have to fall back on the somewhat heavy description her son gives us. Whatever else she was able to impart to him, she failed in imparting her style, and he writes with the ponderous and 'faded unction' Brémond abhors. Yet we gather from him that his mother was tall and good-looking, that her appearance had nothing effeminate about it but spoke rather of strength and courage. 'She was of a pleasant disposition,' he says, 'and although the continual presence of God gave her a sense of gravity and restraint, she showed herself nevertheless a person most good-natured and affable.'

Here we come to that dissimulation she seems often to have practised. Even her own mother had thought her too light-hearted to be a nun, and all her life her outbursts of playfulness and gaiety made the more conservative doubt whether she was fitted for the cloister. Yet her real self was deeply serious though she was never rigid nor constrained, never stood on her dignity. It is strange, in view of this, to read what she wrote to her son when he complained that people thought him too solemn (as we feel sure he was). 'Do not vex yourself,' she writes, 'if a certain deep recollectedness makes people think you melancholy; that has been said of me and that while my spirit was in great jubilation in the Lord!' That must

[1] Brémond, op. cit., vi. 105.

have been when she was caught unawares, for in common with many saints she preferred to be thought frivolous. She was singular among the saints in one thing, that she was perfectly sound in body, for most of them suffered from ill health owing to the strain and tension of living on two planes. Yet she endured all manner of hardship, she lived an exacting life, and till old age brought its infirmities, she enjoyed good health.

Always ready to go out generously to the needs of others, she was deeply interested in the natives whose habits and expressive gestures delighted her. 'Everything about them speaks,' she declared; 'their gestures are as eloquent as their words.' Everything interested her: the hopes and fears of the missionaries, the news from France, the hardships of life in a new country. She was always young in spirit, always saw the cheerful side of things; everything unduly solemn was distasteful to her, everything tearful repugnant.

Sometimes she wrote careful little studies to her son on the difficulties and problems of the interior life:

> We cannot see ahead; we grope in the dark. Even if we consult wise and sensible people, things seldom turn out as we have foreseen them. We go on, nevertheless, and just when we think ourselves at the bottom of a precipice, we find ourselves at the top. This happens in everything; in great public affairs as in each little family circle.

Here she is reminded of her own little family:

> When we hear of some misfortune having happened at the hands of the Iroquois[1] . . . every one wants to hurry back to France—but at the same time people marry, build houses,

[1] Misfortune is a mild term, for the Iroquois were constantly giving trouble. In 1649 they almost completely wiped out the Hurons, and many priests and missionaries lost their lives at that time.

the country extends its boundaries, the land is cleared. . . . We too have cleared as much ground as we could. . . . We have four oxen and six cows. . . .[1]

To a religious in France she writes :

What a joy it is to find oneself with a great troop of native women and girls, whose miserable coverings—a skin or an old rug—do not smell so pleasant as those of the ladies of France but whose candour and simplicity is so unspeakably attractive. That of the men no less so. I see great-hearted and valiant leaders kneeling at my feet asking me to show them how to pray to God before they break their fast. They join their hands like little children and I make them say anything I want. They ask me why we have our heads covered and why they see us through the 'hole,' as they call our *grille*. . . . We have native men and women as devout as any of your devotees in France. There is this difference, that they are not so subtle or so refined as some of yours but they are newly regenerate souls. When I hear Pigaroouich, Noël Negabamat, and Trigalin, I would not leave this place to listen to the finest preacher in Europe![2]

Dom Claude tells us a pleasing story about some of the little heathen girls who bewailed innocently that they were not good! That no one gave them nice new frocks such as little French girls got! The story was repeated to the Reverend Mother to amuse her. But she did not take it that way. 'She got out a piece of fine red serge, cut out nine or ten dresses which she gave them, as well as new shoes and stockings, and for a still greater proof of her love for them, she made most of these dresses herself.' Dom Claude goes on to draw a heavy moral from all this which exasperates Brémond: 'How heavy he is!' he exclaims; 'while he perorates his mother could have cut out ten more dresses!'[3]

The office of Superior being held in rotation, Marie de l'Incarnation gave it up from time to

[1] *Lettres*, i. 467. [2] ibid., i. 117.
[3] Brémond, op. cit., vi. 124.

time to perform menial duties. But even then, as the foundress, she was responsible for the new mission. It was not all plain sailing; we know she had difficulties to overcome though we do not know exactly what they were. Possibly the Government had to be diplomatically dealt with; possibly there was friction with the other missions. There may have been difficulties in her own community of which half the Sisters came from the mother-house in Tours, the other half from Paris, and their Constitutions were different till the new Constitutions for Canada were drawn up. Whatever her difficulties may have been, they did not really disturb her. One of her own Sisters, thinking she had much to bear, asked her once how she could so patiently suffer injustice? She replied, simply that she had not noticed it, but added with nice humour:

> May it please God to make me worthy to be the butt of all the world, I mean the devout world, for its blows are infinitely more piercing than all the intrigues of sinners.

She may here have been echoing S. François de Sales who said: 'Just as the sting of a bee is more painful than that of a fly, so the contradiction and opposition of good men is far harder to bear than that of the ungodly.' [1]

In all her difficulties she had the support of Père Jerome Lallemant:

> 'He takes incredible care of us,' she wrote, 'as much of our souls as of our bodies; as he is very kind, he wards off many blows it would be difficult for us to bear.[2] . . . Dom Raymond and he are the two people in the world to whom our Lord has particularly attached me for the direction of my soul, and I owe them infinite thanks for the great help they have given me in my necessities.'

[1] *Devout Life*, iii. 3. [2] *Lettres*, ii. 194.

Let us now in conclusion look for a little at her teaching—sometimes a little difficult to grasp but always of great depth and beauty. All her activities were impelled and penetrated by the radiance of her inner life. Those who like to think of the contemplatives as ineffective beings who dream away aimless lives, would do well to ponder the hard training and self-discipline to which such heroic souls freely give themselves. Theirs is no nice comfortable sanctity, soon and easily acquired. One of the first necessities they have to face is the acquiring and acceptance of spiritual poverty, the giving up of all self-will, even to the giving up of the hunger for knowledge, a hunger which especially besets those who seek to penetrate the mysteries of the Divine. Marie de l'Incarnation had a very active intelligence; she had to learn to subdue its demands, as we see from this letter to her son written when he, too, had begun to suffer in the same way: he who belonged to a community famous for its scholarship.

You must not be surprised by this great activity of the understanding. I think people who study deeply are subject to that because of the matters they have to deal with, that is, if their wills are not entirely given over to God; for then the will has the mastery and when it wishes it draws the understanding after it. I used to be troubled in that way till, having to teach the mysteries of the Faith, I only allowed my mind to dwell on what was said in the Catechism . . . then all at once my spirit was in possession of the truth. I found myself at once in such clear understanding that nothing could have been better. . . .[1]

As to those impressions which are at once light and love, love always prevails, because the soul never asks to *see* but always rather to *love*, to be in union with Him whom it loves. The soul asks nothing but to enjoy such a state; it is enough for it to know by an experiential science of love that He is in it and with it and that He is God. But there is still some

[1] *Lettres*, i. 399.

self-will in this ; it must all grow quieter ; the will must sink down into absolute calm—*not* into indolence, but into absolute union with the will of God. . . .[1]

The Spirit of God, which demands everything for itself, seeing that the understanding, however purified, still mingles something of its own action with the divine operations (which is an impurity and a lack of real spiritual poverty), suddenly . . . arrests the understanding so that it is, as it were, suspended and rendered incapable of its own ordinary operations, which it no longer recognizes as its own because their simplicity makes them almost imperceptible.[2]

She gives us an example of this out of her own experience :

One day many imperfections crowded confusedly into my spirit. I had resolved to correct them but this resolution had hardly been made when my understanding was completely suspended and the representation of all sin, of every fault and imperfection, had ceased. . . . The will felt as if *singing*, I can express it in no other way. For it was greatly moved, ceaselessly praising the Person of the Word. . . . I then abandoned myself to its leading for everything it did pleased me. . . .[3]

Another day, proposing to meditate on the words, *It is in this that we know the love of God, that He has given His life for us*, Marie had the following experience :

From the first apprehension of these words, my spirit was powerless to act. It was firmly bound to the Divine Majesty by a vision I had had which remained with me habitually, of the love which His love produced in me. I felt my soul in its depths unite itself more and more to this God-Love ; force and gentleness met together in this redoubled union. It was He who held my soul in this happy captivity and it acquiesced in this divine operation. . . . This lasted only a short time, for at once I found myself in a great abyss by a new operation which I cannot explain, feeling myself lost in its immensity and incomprehensibility. . . . One knows very well that one is in this abyss but one cannot say what it is, because one only sees it as a great Love whose breadth and depth and height

[1] *La Vie*, p. 85. [2] ibid., p. 647.
[3] *Meditations*, pp. 161 sqq.

have neither bounds nor limits. . . . From time to time I said, or rather breathed softly : ' O great abyss ! O great abyss ! O Love ! Immense ! Incomprehensible ! Infinite ! '

Nevertheless I did not cease to be instructed in a lofty and sublime manner as to the way in which Love must be practised. For even if, in these great unions, we are occupied only with God, we receive, nevertheless in an imperceptible way, light and force to do all that God demands of us. . . . That is perhaps what the Beloved Disciple means when he says that the unction of God instructs in all things. . . .[1]

Marie sometimes found herself in a sort of prayer in which passages of Scripture were made clear to her. It seemed to her then that hidden secrets were being disclosed. And although such knowledge did not always remain as distinct as it had been in prayer, it did not fail to return to her, ' when she had need of it.'

Writing of the suspension of the understanding when the soul is in a state of union with God, she says that while the soul cannot meditate in this state it has nevertheless a power of contemplating the sacred mysteries.

This way of contemplation is of great gentleness. For these divine mysteries belonging to the ever-adorable Word Incarnate, the slightest thought of them inflames the soul which thus sees in them so much truth, certitude, and holiness that it has no need of reasonings or reflections to know them better. . . . For being united to the Sacred Person of the Word, the soul is in its Source, which teaches it all truth and makes it live by its influence. . . . The soul has life in Him and of Him in an ecstasy which can better be felt than spoken.[2]

In another place she tries to tell her son the nature of the intercourse between the contemplating soul and God ; she describes the simplicity of it as an *air* which is observed sometimes on the face or in the bearing of a person and which, without a word being spoken, discloses the affec-

[1] *Meditations*, p. 134. [2] *La Vie*, p. 472.

tions of the heart and the interior inclinations of the soul in a way infinitely more alive and more touching than the most animated words could do. It is a certain disposition which one sees and understands well enough, but which is difficult to explain otherwise than by saying that it is an air which speaks without uttering a word. When some unhappy creature presents himself to you silently, she says, he explains his misery and enlists your sympathy better thus than he could by many eloquent words. And so, while the contemplative soul converses familiarly with the Word, the Bridegroom, this intercourse is so simple that it is not an act, not even a breath, but an air in the centre of the soul, by which, without effort, without words, without movement, it says to the Divine Persons all that it would say.[1]

Contemplation, she tells us again and again, does not in any way hinder or suspend the moral life ; it rather assures it, purifies it, and exalts it, giving it an intensity otherwise unattainable. For it compels the soul faithfully to practise the imitation of Christ.

> There is here no question of a certain straining which one has at the beginning of the spiritual life, nor of a certain fervour one then experiences in the senses. . . . But the soul in its peace sees all at once in its Lord the divine virtues He practised ; it sees them in a very gentle attraction which leads it to follow its Divine Example in all its acts, and thus it cannot and will not be anything but a continual sacrifice to the glory of God.[2]

Again and again she says, and this is the central doctrine of her life :

> I feel something in me which gives me a *continual tendency* to follow and embrace that which I know to be most to the

[1] *La Vie*, p. 662. This passage is paraphrased by Brémond, op. cit., vi 154.

[2] *Lettres*, i. 364.

glory of God and which seems to me the most perfect. . . . In this state one feels oneself impelled to the practice of all the virtues of the Gospel. . . . The soul makes greater progress in one day in this disposition than it would make in a month in any other. This loving approach to the Holy Word Incarnate breathes into the soul an unction past all expression and gives to its actions sincerity, straightness, frankness, simplicity, and avoidance of every obliquity. It establishes in the heart the love of the Cross and of those by whom it is persecuted ; it makes the soul conscious of the graces of the Beatitudes in a manner which God alone knows.[1]

When she thinks her son in danger of becoming scrupulous and self-occupied, here are the reassuring words she sends him :

Do not be surprised if you see faults in your conduct ; it is the state of union to which God calls you which opens your eyes to them. The more light the Spirit gives you the more you will see such impurities. . . . You will see that they become more and more subtle and of a different nature. For there are no longer impurities of vice or imperfections formerly committed unwittingly through attachment or habit. They are now much more subtle and interior, and the Spirit of God, which can suffer nothing impure, grants no truce to the soul which does not strive to its utmost to pass from this stage which is more pure, to that which is purer still. [2]

Brémond adds an illuminating little remark to this, that though the soul does, in a sense, strive in such a state, it does so passively, in the same way that a photographic plate is exposed to the light ; it is God who imprints Himself on such a soul.[3]

Writing of the life lived in the presence of God while the self is occupied with external works, she says :

There is a divine intercourse between God and the soul by a union closer than can be imagined. . . . If the person

[1] ibid., i. 404. [2] ibid., ii. 257.
[3] Brémond, op. cit., vi. 161.

has much to do, she does her work without ceasing to suffer that which God works in her. Her occupations are even a comfort, for the senses being occupied and diverted, the soul is left more free. . . .

This third state of prayer is the most sublime . . . the senses are in it so free that the soul which has attained to it can continue the occupations of its calling, without distraction. . . . It is a continuous state in which the soul rests so calmly that nothing can distract it. . . . If, for example, illness must be borne, the soul is raised, as it were, above the body and endures its sufferings as if they belonged to some one else. . . . If necessary or trivial business brings certain things into the imagination, they are only little clouds, to be compared to those which pass across the sun and only obscure its light for a short time. . . . And, moreover, during this time, God continues to shine in the depths of the soul, which is, as it were, waiting, like a person one interrupts while she is speaking to another; though interrupted, she still looks at him to whom she spoke. . . . She is waiting in silence; then she returns to her intimate union.[1]

Marie de l'Incarnation deals very wisely with the inevitable times of dereliction. What afflicts the soul in such times of darkness is, she says, that it fears it has been inconstant, that it has neither virtue nor solidity. And yet, all that is compatible with this intimate union which is in the centre of the soul, in a region of peace which seems separated from the soul itself. The soul fears it has never had any solid virtues, that the little it thought it possessed of the interior life, did not really come from God. It thinks all its peace and all its gifts have been false.[2] Such desolation, though it may temporarily darken even a radiant soul like that of Marie de l'Incarnation, cannot, once the solid background of contemplation is established, dismay it for long. It is to be regarded as a change in the weather, a passing shadow, a gift too, in its way, from God, and as

[1] *Lettres*, ii. 462. [2] *La Vie*, p. 457.

such to be gratefully received, faithfully, peacefully used.

After Marie de l'Incarnation began her actively constructive work in Canada, she seems to have lived continuously in the state of union she has so well described, a union which, as she tells us, nothing could long disturb. Dom Claude thinks this the crowning grace of his mother's life. Touching lightly on the question of miracles—always regarded by the mystics themselves as the accidents, not the essentials—he says :

I see nothing more miraculous than a being who, charged with a human body and subject to the strayings of a fickle imagination, yet preserved the presence and vision of God all her life without letting herself be distracted by work, business, conversation, illness, day or night. . . . That was certainly the grace of the Mother of the Incarnation, and it must not be thought that this continual interior occupation prevented her from acquitting herself well of her exterior functions. For, seeing that exterior occupations do not interrupt interior union, in the same way interior union does not prevent external works. Martha and Mary were never in better accord in any one : the contemplation of the one put no obstacle in the way of the activities of the other.[1]

Let her tell us that once more in her own tranquil words :

When I go about the house or walk in the garden, I feel my heart quickened by continual transports of love . . . sometimes it seems to me my heart must fly away and leave its proper place. . . .

But though the interior part suffers much, the exterior part feels more vigorous and more capable of acting in greater purity and delicacy because it is not entangled in anything that hinders it. It sends nothing to the senses but keeps all in its own depths.[2]

Of her instructions to her nuns, we have only

[1] ibid., p. 701. [2] ibid., p. 698.

space to quote a few remarks made at different times, on the life of prayer :

> Many long for the gift of prayer but they do not strive for that of humility and real self-giving, without which there can be no real prayer. . . .
>
> There can be no real prayer without mortification, no real inner life. The one must keep step with the other ; if they do not, then our devotions must be suspect. . . .
>
> She who speaks much has not the gift of prayer, nor even that of devotion to deeply love God, for it is not possible to have heart and mouth open both to God and man. . . .
>
> One can exceed in the desire to know, but not in the desire to love.[1]

These few extracts must suffice. We breathe in them the rarified air of the mountain tops. We live with one whose quiet certitude carries conviction.

When Marie de l'Incarnation looked round her after more than thirty years' work in Canada, she saw churches and houses where before had been broken-down huts. And she had not merely established a material convent but had laid the foundations of a community which would outlast the centuries, spreading over New France the blessings of civilization as well as of religion. She had lived through all the perils which had beset the young colony ; fire, famine, siege, pestilence, not to mention the awful cold from which she and her Sisters suffered bitterly if uncomplainingly, their habits being inadequate for that climate. All danger from the Iroquois was now a thing of the past ; they welcomed gladly the brothers of the priests they had so cruelly put to death. New churches were springing up ; the Jesuits had opened a college where five hundred students were being trained.

Of the great men she met out there it is interest-

[1] Chapot, op. cit., i. 241.

ing to remember the Abbé Bernières, nephew of the early benefactor of the mission; the Abbé Fénelon, brother of the great Archbishop of Cambrai; and Mgr de Laval, the first Bishop of New France. Bossuet was only echoing their estimate of her when he described her as the French Teresa; 'French,' Brémond adds, 'to her finger-tips.'

She also earned for herself the title of the Teresa of the New World. She had to deal with secular and ecclesiastical rulers in the interests of the young colony, she had to bargain with merchants, and she had to lead her nuns and her scholars in the way of perfection. None of all that drew her away from the presence of God in which she lived. 'The closer one lives to God,' she said, 'the more clearly one sees one's way in temporal things.' Her constant care was to give herself whole-heartedly to everything, while attaching herself to nothing. She had been attracted to this interior detachment, this true spiritual poverty, from the beginning.

> For I saw this great virtue held the first place in the sublime life of the Son of God, and I was convinced that all other virtues were comprised in this one. I saw that its tendency was nothing else but to lead the soul to that perfect love which sees nothing but God alone. . . . Simplicity is the gateway of Perfection; it is impossible that a soul can ever be filled with the Spirit of Christ till simplicity has emptied it of self.[1]

She died in Quebec in the April of 1672 when seventy-two years old, having worked in Canada for thirty-two years.

Thus she consummated that continual tendency to God in which she had lived—'being united to the Sacred Person of the Word, her soul was in its Source, in that great Love whose breadth and depth and height have neither bounds nor limits.'

[1] Baunard, op. cit., pp. 448, 469.

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ELISABETH LESEUR, 1866–1914

WE have now studied nine types of sanctity which occurred in different lands throughout a period of over eight hundred years. Five of our examples adopted the religious life in their youth; of these, S. Hildegard became an abbess, Mechthild a beguine, Julian an anchoress, S. Catharine of Siena a Dominican tertiary, S. Teresa a Carmelite foundress and prioress. Two of our examples, Angela of Foligno and Marie de l'Incarnation, entered religion in later life; one, Mme Acarie, became a Carmelite after her work was done, though her life was spent in the service of religion; and one, S. Catharine of Genoa, was never attached to any religious Order.

Three of our examples—S. Hildegard, S. Catharine of Genoa, and S. Teresa—belonged to the nobility, possibly also Mechthild of Magdeburg; the other five to various degrees of the middle classes. Some of them were well educated women of commanding personality and genius, others had little learning and were simple and homely. The diversity in time, place, circumstance, and temperament is considerable. What then is the bond of union between these nine women?

Here our title seems to be insufficient. To us, indeed, reflections of the Divine they had made themselves, by self-giving, training, and discipline, instruments capable of being used by God for His purposes; capable in fact of co-operation with Him. This seems a tremendous claim to make.

Yet each of these women was conscious of such a vocation, each was aware of a supernatural call, each surrendered herself to the will of the Holy, eager to share, to the limit of her powers, in the redemptive sacrifice of her Lord.

To show that such lives are not merely historical curiosities but that they can be, and are, lived in our own day, we take as our final example the life of Elisabeth Leseur who died in Paris as recently as 1914. More apparently important women might have been chosen, philanthropists or heads of Orders who left concrete works behind them. We choose rather this hidden life because it is representative of lives being lived among us to-day, but of which, for obvious reasons, nothing is ever heard.

Elisabeth Leseur was the wife of a prosperous Parisian business man who happened also to be an ardent sceptic. She was an intelligent woman who lived in the world and amply fulfilled the duties of her position. She was fond of travel, interested in art and music, a good hostess who made her house attractive to young people. She lived in fact, to all appearances, a good, ordinary life.

But after her death her husband found various notebooks, a so-called *Journal*, a *Book of Resolutions*, a *Spiritual Testament*, and other writings. They showed that Elisabeth Leseur had been inspired by the same other-worldly desires and longings as the nine creative personalities we have just studied.

She began to keep a Journal when she was thirty-three. It is not really a Journal but a book in which she wrote from time to time when she felt she must have some outlet for her thoughts, for she lived in complete spiritual isolation, in an atmosphere definitely hostile to all that was most

precious to herself. Yet her husband, a distinguished and attractive man, who for years did his best to argue her into atheism, has been led through study of her writings to attempt the same kind of life and has entered the Dominican Order.

Elisabeth was ill more or less all her life. Up till 1908, when she was forty-two, she was able to go about to a certain extent, to entertain and lead a fairly normal existence. But from 1908 her life became more and more that of an invalid, ending, after ten months' acute suffering, on May 3, 1914.

We do not know much about her youth ; her father was a barrister ; her family devout practising Catholics. But Elisabeth's attraction to religion had little to do with any human agency. She tells us it was ' provoked, guided, accomplished by God alone, without any human influence.' Though her *Journal* begins in 1899 it is in the spring of 1903 that she came to the real turning point. She came to know then that she must make her life a finer, purer thing, a better instrument for the service of God and her neighbour.

> How much has happened in the last few months in the life of my soul ! What gentle achievement of this long-prepared transformation willed by God and so wonderfully wrought out that only now, looking back on the way I have come, from the height to which Christ has led me, I can recognize the different stages and give thanks for the work accomplished by Him.[1]

The ideals which inspired Elisabeth were the same as those which inspired the saints ; selflessness, detachment, poverty, acceptance of suffering, joyfulness, and great love of God and her neighbour. She was apt to be introspective at first, but through the years we see the gentle, gradual, silent transformation taking place in her, her

[1] *Journal* (French edition), p. 91.

progress towards peace and stability. There is nothing constrained or narrow or solemn about her. She advances naturally and quietly as a free and supple child of God. She had something of Teresa's genius for self-analysis, and it led her to a penetrating knowledge of herself. She strove to achieve absolute submission to the will of God, acceptance of all situations and duties, and she tells us what she conceived these duties to be.

I feel that my whole life, assisted by the interior light and divine grace of which I am so conscious, must be a life of conciliations. I must profess, simply and strongly, the faith which long working of the Divine in me has created. I must do this in such a way as never to wound the convictions of others or their want of conviction. I must secretly sacrifice my tastes and inclinations, everything except the principles by which I live. . . . I must do what I believe to be my duty, good works for others and for the poor, in such a way that no one can take exception to it and that it in no way interferes with my immediate duties. I must never sacrifice intellectual work but must study regularly. I must even become a little social, in spite of my love of staying at home, of a simple life, of solitude, in order to please Felix and my friends.

I must, in fact, fulfil my various duties without letting any one suspect the difficulty I have in reconciling them with my inclinations. I must forget myself and develop all that God has given me of reason and intelligence, banish pride even in its most subtle forms which I know so well. I must love strongly and without self-seeking and accept the duties of every day and hour gladly as they come, not neglecting even the smallest. I shall often fail, but the support which I humbly ask from above will never fail me.

After all, to live is to fight, to suffer, and to love ![1]

Such was the bracing ideal this valiant woman set before her. She was specially particular about being kind to tiresome people who bored her, a practice most of us find more galling than that of the robust virtues. She had no scorn for the

[1] *Journal*, p. 87.

butterflies, those who loved gaiety and lived for themselves, but thought they, more than others, should be cared for, that they might realize what really mattered. She wished to give her time to humble people, those in suffering, those for whom life was hard. And living among unbelievers she wrote :

I want to love with a special love those whose birth or religion or ideas separate them from me ; it is they whom I want to understand. . . . To have boundless charity in my heart . . . especially towards those who do not humanly attract me.[1]

Hers was a simple creed ; she would have liked to live a full, active life, but realizing that that was not her affair, she accepted every event, every joy, every illness, as a gift from God, so that nothing came amiss. She considered that the hindrances and weariness of ill health were a form of action of which God knew how to dispose for His glory.

Mothers of families are kept busy with their maternal cares, while I, in my little corner, fill my humble place. It seems obscure and mediocre. It is full of limitations and inertia, but God will know how to use it.

Each in his own place and all in Christ. Is not that the truth and all as it should be ?

With deep wisdom Madame Leseur balanced the fervours of her contemplative life by serious study. She realized the necessity of developing every side of her being. She read Horace and Juvenal and other Latin authors and set herself to the study of philosophy.

It throws light on many things and it puts the mind in order. I cannot understand why it is not made the crown of a woman's education. What a woman so often lacks is true judgement, the habit of reasoning, the steady individual working of the mind. Philosophy could give her all that and strip

[1] ibid., pp. 54, 213.

from her so many prejudices and narrow ideas which she transmits religiously to her sons to the great detriment of our country.[1]

Her religion was thus not confined to specifically religious acts. It was her whole life. Her Latin authors and her philosophy expanded and developed her mind ; no intensive cultivation of one part of her being was going to fashion a tool worthy of being used for the purposes of God. He was for her the God of Nature as of Grace. No action or feeling or affection was to be suppressed because of her self-dedication ; rather was everything to be transformed in the supernatural atmosphere in which she sought to live. That is why the saints and those who attempt this ' costing ' life on two planes let so much fresh air into religion, why their natures are so large and free and rich and generous ; their whole being basks as it were in the divine sunshine ; all their faculties and powers are successively turned to it. ' They are drenched through by the Eternal Brightness even as the air is drenched through by sunshine.'

Reflecting on the circumstances in which she lived and on her awareness of the indwelling Presence actuating her, filling her with longing for the Ultimate Perfection, she writes :

In making known to me His intimate action in the soul, in placing me in the midst of people negative and indifferent to divine things, . . . God has doubtless intended that I should understand widely different natures. . . . To be a Good Samaritan to embittered, troubled, and anxious spirits, to have delicacy and respect for souls, to approach them gently, . . . to show them God by letting Him shine through the soul in which He lives, to be all things to all men and thus win souls for Christ—*this* is the task of the apostle. I accept it of Thee in spite of my unworthiness. . . .

I know well what this implies. First a growing interior life,

[1] *Journal*, p. 54.

deriving love and tranquillity from Holy Communion and from prayer . . . transforming and sanctifying my intellectual work by giving it supernatural intention, in doing it humbly without personal preoccupation, for the good of souls. . . .

People do not understand that one can be very detached from all human things and live a keen spiritual life and yet find pleasure in the interests and occupations of the world. It is only when one has understood eternity that one can fully experience that delight. Love, Nature, Art, and all beauties of life . . . I rejoice in them all, for they are a reflection of the Beauty and Love which have taken possession of my being.[1]

A thread of real heroism runs through her life; no one must know what she is suffering; she must occupy her mind with the sorrows of others; no one must be annoyed by her devotions; her faith must be seen only in its results; she must smile and sympathize and share the burdens of others; the weight of her own are to be a secret between God and herself. Her interior life must be hidden, her work for others done in secret.

She tried to practise hidden austerities, but only such as could not affect her health. Here is one of her resolutions:

To speak little of my physical suffering and yet give myself reasonable care. . . . Never to show by irritation or outward exhaustion the moral and physical fatigue caused by certain difficulties and long illness. To do everything to guard and improve my health, and out of this irksome care to make a useful moral mortification.[2]

Interested in social work, she saw that too with large vision:

Let us think less of humanity and more of men, or rather let us remember that humanity is made of beings each one of whom needs light and strength from God, and that it belongs to us to spread the light as far as we can. . . . I tell myself . . . that the Apostles were hardly greater than we when they began their divine labour and that the strength of the Holy

[1] ibid., p. 209. [2] ibid., p. 169.

Spirit was necessary to change them and make them new men. . . . Let us ask for that complete transformation of our being and our life, which will enable us to work for our brethren.[1]

When she had to give up her social work, she did so without complaint and only tried to be the more cheerful. She reflected then on the duties of age to youth. Developed by life, having achieved a disciplined will, age should possess a special serenity and beauty. It can only possess them if long preparation has gone before.

One must have lit in oneself so bright a flame of sympathy and tenderness that all who are beginning as we are ending can come and seek light and warmth at our fireside.

It was just that bright flame of sympathy which made her room a centre of attraction, so much so that her husband feared the strain for her of the constant stream of visitors who came to bask in her sunshine. In that connection there is the story of a friend who used often to visit her. One night she was anxious about something and her husband, advising her to go and consult Elisabeth, exclaimed, 'Go and take your bath of serenity!'

It is not surprising to learn that she constantly read the New Testament and that the more she read the more charm and strength and life she found. 'My will is reinforced there and my heart is warmed. It helps me to understand life, to welcome duty cheerfully and to will strongly.'[2] This expression reminds us of S. François de Sales: 'I like vigorous souls,' he had said, 'who will and love strongly. Your half-withered hearts are of little use in this world.' There was nothing half-withered about Elisabeth. She too had this characteristic lightness of touch and she made a resolution to 'keep supernatural joy strong' within her,

[1] *Journal*, p. 59. [2] ibid., p. 66.

to be joyful whether she felt like it or not, a dissimulation we may surely rank among the virtues. The suffering of her last years must have made this difficult, but even when in pain, she was able to welcome her visitors with gladness. She writes of the plans she has made :

I am going to fill my life with work and love and accomplishment of duty. . . . One resolution which I have taken and begun to put into practice . . . is to be joyful in the Christian sense of the word . . . in spite of, or even because of, this prostration and dislike and lassitude that come from my physical state. Serenity within, gentleness and smiles without. I must be good-tempered when I feel cross, cordial to visitors when I long to be alone, friendly when I feel wearied and irritable. . . .

I must try to get as much time as possible for recollection that my soul may have the food it so deeply needs, which will make it stronger and more peaceful and fill it with supernatural life.[1]

It explains a good deal about Mme Leseur to know that S. Catharine of Siena and S. Teresa were her favourite saints, their books were by her bed-side. Many of her sayings have a Teresian flavour about them, and in her doctrine of suffering we see how deeply she has learnt from S. Catharine. But Elisabeth's conception of the use of suffering has much that is her own, and to show how she regarded it let us read a letter she wrote to a friend whose husband was threatened with blindness :

I know all that suffering means, the fine and mysterious power it possesses, what it obtains and what it accomplishes. After all, our activity is of little importance. And so when Providence prefers to work by means of suffering, I think we should not complain too much, for we can then be sure that the work will be well done and not mixed up with all the misery of egotism and pride which sometimes spoils so much of our outward activity. I know by experience that in hours of trial certain graces are obtained for others which all our efforts

[1] ibid., pp. 77, 219, 181.

had not hitherto obtained. I have thus come to the conclusion that suffering is the higher form of action, the best expression in the wonderful communion of saints, and that in suffering one is sure not to make mistakes, sure too to be useful to others and to the great causes one longs to serve.[1]

Those to whom this idea is new will respect it the more when they consider what Baron von Hügel thought about it :

All human souls are deeply interconnected . . . we cannot only pray but suffer for each other. . . . Nothing is more real than this interconnection, this gracious power put by God Himself into the very heart of our infirmities.[2]

Elisabeth grew into this doctrine more and more. She wished in herself to make amends by suffering and sacrifice, to give suffering a supernatural intention. Suffering was for her creative :

Our suffering works mysteriously, first in ourselves by a kind of renewal and also in others who are perhaps far away, without our ever knowing what we are accomplishing. . . . Christ on the Cross has perhaps done more for humanity than Christ speaking and acting in Galilee or Jerusalem. Suffering creates life. It transforms everything it touches.[3]

' Suffering that is accepted and offered up is the best of prayers,' is another of her Teresian remarks. She never ceased to feel the difficulty of living in absolute spiritual isolation, among people who not only believed nothing themselves but scoffed at her faith.

It is a suffering sent from God and which I offer to Him, that I should have no one among all my friends to whom I can unburden myself and who might understand and help me. . . . Waste of time, intercourse with people who do not attract me and who have nothing spiritual to give me, the effort to be smiling and pleasant when I crave for solitude and understanding—all this is my hidden cross, the best because it does not provoke sympathy or admiration as illness or misfortune do.[4]

[1] *Journal*, p. 24. [2] Von Hügel, *Selected Letters*, p. 269.
[3] *Journal*, p. 296. [4] ibid., p. 81.

But in the last four years of her life Elisabeth did find a friend after her own heart, and the letters she wrote to her—a nursing sister in a hospital some distance from Paris—develop her conception of the use of suffering.

The Stoics said *Suffering is nothing* and they were wrong. Illuminated by a clearer light we Christians say *Suffering is everything!* It demands, it obtains, everything. Through it God consents to accomplish everything. It is suffering which helps Christ to save the world and souls. When I am overwhelmed by the immensity of my desires for those I love, by the greatness of that which I hope to attain for them, it is towards suffering that I turn. It is through suffering that I ask to be allowed to serve as an intermediary between God and souls. It is the perfect form of prayer, the only infallible form of action. . . . *Per Crucem ad Lucem.*[1]

In another letter she quotes these invigorating words, 'There are times when one must take one's heart and throw it at the feet of God—and walk over it!' She had a virile and heroic way of looking at things. When her friend—a professed religious—complained of ignorance and weakness in spiritual things, Elisabeth took her briskly to task:

This proves that, contrary to your material views, your spiritual insight is becoming clearer and better focussed. The saints themselves—and we are not saints—broke out into distress and humility when their little miseries were confronted by the grandeur of the Divine Beauty![2]

She entrusted this friend with the duty of telling her husband, after her death, that she had offered all her illness and suffering for his conversion; but after giving these final injunctions she breaks out gaily, 'Perhaps after all I shall live to be a hundred and that will be all to the good provided that at a hundred as at forty-four I can worship God and work for Him!'

[1] *Lettres sur la Souffrance*, p. 251. [2] Op. cit., p. 186.

She ordered her friend to *enjoy* her holidays, saying it was rude not to enjoy what God had provided. She appreciated the necessity of making her religion attractive to others. She loved working among the poor and did so as long as her health allowed. Then, in her last invalid years, she gradually became convinced that prayer can be more powerful than action; she thought that what our generation chiefly lacked was the power of contemplation.

In Elisabeth's conception of it, the life of prayer is therefore a supernatural life, and this she developed more and more in herself. By long training and dedication she gradually brought herself into contact with that great spiritual world which functions below the visible surface of things but of which few of us in our best moments are unaware. She thought that the power of prayer, like every other power or faculty, could be developed, and as this truth took possession of her she resolved to be an apostle of prayer—'that high and fruitful form of action, the more secure that it is secret and works with God for souls. Prayer is the higher form of activity; through it we act directly upon God while the outward flowing act is directed to our fellow men.'

The most famous paragraph of all her writings is probably that in which she states her belief in what we may call the Gulf Stream of prayer:

> I believe that there circulates among souls—those here below, those expiating their sins, and those who have attained true life—a vast and ceaseless stream of the sufferings, merits, and love of all these souls; and that even our slightest pains, our least sorrows, can, through the Divine action, reach out to souls both dear and distant and bring them light and peace and holiness.[1]

In this 'divine mysterious law which we call

[1] *Journal*, p. 317.

the Communion of Saints,' everything can be used. So rich a conception of prayer and suffering opens up realms of possibility we dimly realize. The pain and sorrow of the world might thus, instead of being feared and shunned, be made fruitful. The very attempt so to use it for divine ends, raises it at once into the atmosphere of the Holy and thus sanctifies it and makes it a worship instead of a wound. Every aspect and activity of life can thus be sanctified and used for others, all suffering can be fertilized and made to bring forth fruit. Psychologists will hardly tell us this is impossible, though it is difficult to grasp all that it implies. For we seem here to be on the fringe of vast but as yet uncharted regions. But those spiritual teachers best qualified to speak, assure us that such sanctification and use of suffering is work that can be done, work that is being done, that in this way even the humblest soul can share, according to its tiny powers, in the redemptive sacrifice of Calvary. For it was on Calvary that the use of suffering was first revealed.

'I desire one thing only,' said Elisabeth Leseur, 'the accomplishment of Thy will in me and through me. I follow and desire more and more to follow one end alone—the gaining of Thy greater glory by the realization of Thy designs for me.' [1]

Her words express the ideal which inspired the saints. Selfless and utterly dedicated to the service of the Divine, it was with the power of God which dwelt in them and enfolded them that they accomplished His will. They shine for us as mirrors in which the Light of Eternity is reflected. That Brightness irradiates their souls and reveals the beauty and heroism of their human lives as well as their supernatural intentions and results.

[1] ibid., p. 197.

'A covered surface,' said S. Catharine of Genoa, 'can never reflect the sun, not through any defect in the sun which continues to shine but from the hindrance offered by the covering.'

Richard of St. Victor suggested the remedy:

Let whoso thirsts to see his God, wipe his mirror and purify his spirit. After he hath thus cleansed his mirror and long and diligently gazed into it, a certain clarity of Divine Light begins to shine through upon him, and an immense ray of unwonted vision to appear before his eyes. . . . From the vision of this light which it sees with wonder in itself, the mind is wondrously inflamed and inspired to behold the Light which is above itself.

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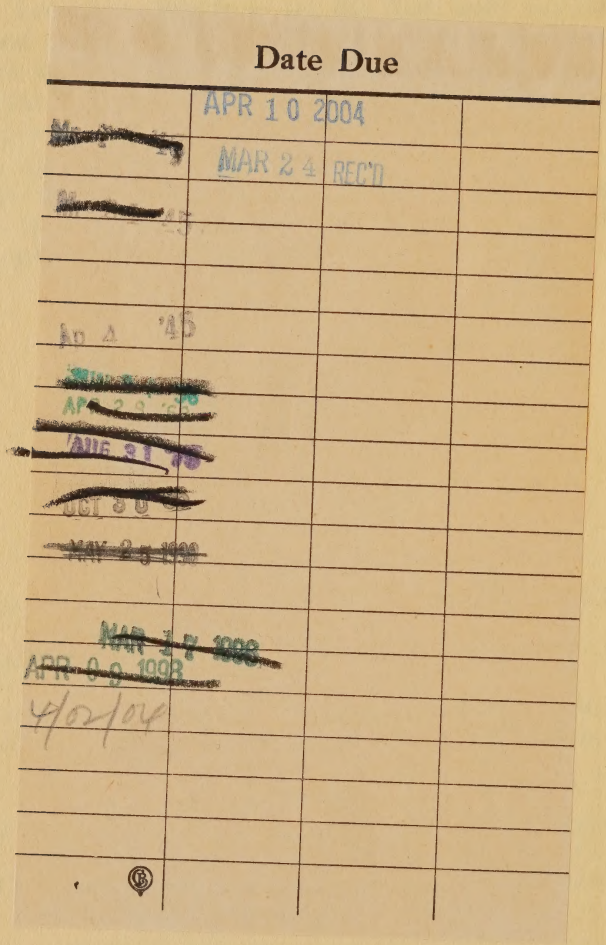
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